The War of the Worlds

by H. G. Wells

‘But who shall dwell in these worlds if they be inhabited?

. . . Are we or they Lords of the World? . . . And

how are all things made for man?’

KEPLER

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BOOK ONE

THE COMING OF THE MARTIANS

I.

THE EVE OF THE WAR.

No one would have believed in the last years of the nineteenth century

that this world was being watched keenly and closely by intelligences

greater than man’s and yet as mortal as his own; that as men busied

themselves about their various concerns they were scrutinised and

studied, perhaps almost as narrowly as a man with a microscope might

scrutinise the transient creatures that swarm and multiply in a drop of

water. With infinite complacency men went to and fro over this globe

about their little affairs, serene in their assurance of their empire

over matter. It is possible that the infusoria under the microscope do

the same. No one gave a thought to the older worlds of space as sources

of human danger, or thought of them only to dismiss the idea of life

upon them as impossible or improbable. It is curious to recall some of

the mental habits of those departed days. At most terrestrial men

fancied there might be other men upon Mars, perhaps inferior to

themselves and ready to welcome a missionary enterprise. Yet across the

gulf of space, minds that are to our minds as ours are to those of the

beasts that perish, intellects vast and cool and unsympathetic,

regarded this earth with envious eyes, and slowly and surely drew their

plans against us. And early in the twentieth century came the great

disillusionment.

The planet Mars, I scarcely need remind the reader, revolves about the

sun at a mean distance of 140,000,000 miles, and the light and heat it

receives from the sun is barely half of that received by this world. It

must be, if the nebular hypothesis has any truth, older than our world;

and long before this earth ceased to be molten, life upon its surface

must have begun its course. The fact that it is scarcely one seventh of

the volume of the earth must have accelerated its cooling to the

temperature at which life could begin. It has air and water and all

that is necessary for the support of animated existence.

Yet so vain is man, and so blinded by his vanity, that no writer, up to

the very end of the nineteenth century, expressed any idea that

intelligent life might have developed there far, or indeed at all,

beyond its earthly level. Nor was it generally understood that since

Mars is older than our earth, with scarcely a quarter of the

superficial area and remoter from the sun, it necessarily follows that

it is not only more distant from time’s beginning but nearer its end.

The secular cooling that must someday overtake our planet has already

gone far indeed with our neighbour. Its physical condition is still

largely a mystery, but we know now that even in its equatorial region

the midday temperature barely approaches that of our coldest winter.

Its air is much more attenuated than ours, its oceans have shrunk until

they cover but a third of its surface, and as its slow seasons change

huge snowcaps gather and melt about either pole and periodically

inundate its temperate zones. That last stage of exhaustion, which to

us is still incredibly remote, has become a present-day problem for the

inhabitants of Mars. The immediate pressure of necessity has brightened

their intellects, enlarged their powers, and hardened their hearts. And

looking across space with instruments, and intelligences such as we

have scarcely dreamed of, they see, at its nearest distance only

35,000,000 of miles sunward of them, a morning star of hope, our own

warmer planet, green with vegetation and grey with water, with a cloudy

atmosphere eloquent of fertility, with glimpses through its drifting

cloud wisps of broad stretches of populous country and narrow,

navy-crowded seas.

And we men, the creatures who inhabit this earth, must be to them at

least as alien and lowly as are the monkeys and lemurs to us. The

intellectual side of man already admits that life is an incessant

struggle for existence, and it would seem that this too is the belief

of the minds upon Mars. Their world is far gone in its cooling and this

world is still crowded with life, but crowded only with what they

regard as inferior animals. To carry warfare sunward is, indeed, their

only escape from the destruction that, generation after generation,

creeps upon them.

And before we judge of them too harshly we must remember what ruthless

and utter destruction our own species has wrought, not only upon

animals, such as the vanished bison and the dodo, but upon its inferior

races. The Tasmanians, in spite of their human likeness, were entirely

swept out of existence in a war of extermination waged by European

immigrants, in the space of fifty years. Are we such apostles of mercy

as to complain if the Martians warred in the same spirit?

The Martians seem to have calculated their descent with amazing

subtlety—their mathematical learning is evidently far in excess of

ours—and to have carried out their preparations with a well-nigh

perfect unanimity. Had our instruments permitted it, we might have seen

the gathering trouble far back in the nineteenth century. Men like

Schiaparelli watched the red planet—it is odd, by-the-bye, that for

countless centuries Mars has been the star of war—but failed to

interpret the fluctuating appearances of the markings they mapped so

well. All that time the Martians must have been getting ready.

During the opposition of 1894 a great light was seen on the illuminated

part of the disk, first at the Lick Observatory, then by Perrotin of

Nice, and then by other observers. English readers heard of it first in

the issue of \_Nature\_ dated August 2. I am inclined to think that this

blaze may have been the casting of the huge gun, in the vast pit sunk

into their planet, from which their shots were fired at us. Peculiar

markings, as yet unexplained, were seen near the site of that outbreak

during the next two oppositions.

The storm burst upon us six years ago now. As Mars approached

opposition, Lavelle of Java set the wires of the astronomical exchange

palpitating with the amazing intelligence of a huge outbreak of

incandescent gas upon the planet. It had occurred towards midnight of

the twelfth; and the spectroscope, to which he had at once resorted,

indicated a mass of flaming gas, chiefly hydrogen, moving with an

enormous velocity towards this earth. This jet of fire had become

invisible about a quarter past twelve. He compared it to a colossal

puff of flame suddenly and violently squirted out of the planet, “as

flaming gases rushed out of a gun.”

A singularly appropriate phrase it proved. Yet the next day there was

nothing of this in the papers except a little note in the \_Daily

Telegraph\_, and the world went in ignorance of one of the gravest

dangers that ever threatened the human race. I might not have heard of

the eruption at all had I not met Ogilvy, the well-known astronomer, at

Ottershaw. He was immensely excited at the news, and in the excess of

his feelings invited me up to take a turn with him that night in a

scrutiny of the red planet.

In spite of all that has happened since, I still remember that vigil

very distinctly: the black and silent observatory, the shadowed lantern

throwing a feeble glow upon the floor in the corner, the steady ticking

of the clockwork of the telescope, the little slit in the roof—an

oblong profundity with the stardust streaked across it. Ogilvy moved

about, invisible but audible. Looking through the telescope, one saw a

circle of deep blue and the little round planet swimming in the field.

It seemed such a little thing, so bright and small and still, faintly

marked with transverse stripes, and slightly flattened from the perfect

round. But so little it was, so silvery warm—a pin’s head of light! It

was as if it quivered, but really this was the telescope vibrating with

the activity of the clockwork that kept the planet in view.

As I watched, the planet seemed to grow larger and smaller and to

advance and recede, but that was simply that my eye was tired. Forty

millions of miles it was from us—more than forty millions of miles of

void. Few people realise the immensity of vacancy in which the dust of

the material universe swims.

Near it in the field, I remember, were three faint points of light,

three telescopic stars infinitely remote, and all around it was the

unfathomable darkness of empty space. You know how that blackness looks

on a frosty starlight night. In a telescope it seems far profounder.

And invisible to me because it was so remote and small, flying swiftly

and steadily towards me across that incredible distance, drawing nearer

every minute by so many thousands of miles, came the Thing they were

sending us, the Thing that was to bring so much struggle and calamity

and death to the earth. I never dreamed of it then as I watched; no one

on earth dreamed of that unerring missile.

That night, too, there was another jetting out of gas from the distant

planet. I saw it. A reddish flash at the edge, the slightest projection

of the outline just as the chronometer struck midnight; and at that I

told Ogilvy and he took my place. The night was warm and I was thirsty,

and I went stretching my legs clumsily and feeling my way in the

darkness, to the little table where the siphon stood, while Ogilvy

exclaimed at the streamer of gas that came out towards us.

That night another invisible missile started on its way to the earth

from Mars, just a second or so under twenty-four hours after the first

one. I remember how I sat on the table there in the blackness, with

patches of green and crimson swimming before my eyes. I wished I had a

light to smoke by, little suspecting the meaning of the minute gleam I

had seen and all that it would presently bring me. Ogilvy watched till

one, and then gave it up; and we lit the lantern and walked over to his

house. Down below in the darkness were Ottershaw and Chertsey and all

their hundreds of people, sleeping in peace.

He was full of speculation that night about the condition of Mars, and

scoffed at the vulgar idea of its having inhabitants who were

signalling us. His idea was that meteorites might be falling in a heavy

shower upon the planet, or that a huge volcanic explosion was in

progress. He pointed out to me how unlikely it was that organic

evolution had taken the same direction in the two adjacent planets.

“The chances against anything manlike on Mars are a million to one,” he

said.

Hundreds of observers saw the flame that night and the night after

about midnight, and again the night after; and so for ten nights, a

flame each night. Why the shots ceased after the tenth no one on earth

has attempted to explain. It may be the gases of the firing caused the

Martians inconvenience. Dense clouds of smoke or dust, visible through

a powerful telescope on earth as little grey, fluctuating patches,

spread through the clearness of the planet’s atmosphere and obscured

its more familiar features.

Even the daily papers woke up to the disturbances at last, and popular

notes appeared here, there, and everywhere concerning the volcanoes

upon Mars. The seriocomic periodical \_Punch\_, I remember, made a happy

use of it in the political cartoon. And, all unsuspected, those

missiles the Martians had fired at us drew earthward, rushing now at a

pace of many miles a second through the empty gulf of space, hour by

hour and day by day, nearer and nearer. It seems to me now almost

incredibly wonderful that, with that swift fate hanging over us, men

could go about their petty concerns as they did. I remember how

jubilant Markham was at securing a new photograph of the planet for the

illustrated paper he edited in those days. People in these latter times

scarcely realise the abundance and enterprise of our nineteenth-century

papers. For my own part, I was much occupied in learning to ride the

bicycle, and busy upon a series of papers discussing the probable

developments of moral ideas as civilisation progressed.

One night (the first missile then could scarcely have been 10,000,000

miles away) I went for a walk with my wife. It was starlight and I

explained the Signs of the Zodiac to her, and pointed out Mars, a

bright dot of light creeping zenithward, towards which so many

telescopes were pointed. It was a warm night. Coming home, a party of

excursionists from Chertsey or Isleworth passed us singing and playing

music. There were lights in the upper windows of the houses as the

people went to bed. From the railway station in the distance came the

sound of shunting trains, ringing and rumbling, softened almost into

melody by the distance. My wife pointed out to me the brightness of the

red, green, and yellow signal lights hanging in a framework against the

sky. It seemed so safe and tranquil.

II.

THE FALLING STAR.

Then came the night of the first falling star. It was seen early in the

morning, rushing over Winchester eastward, a line of flame high in the

atmosphere. Hundreds must have seen it, and taken it for an ordinary

falling star. Albin described it as leaving a greenish streak behind it

that glowed for some seconds. Denning, our greatest authority on

meteorites, stated that the height of its first appearance was about

ninety or one hundred miles. It seemed to him that it fell to earth

about one hundred miles east of him.

I was at home at that hour and writing in my study; and although my

French windows face towards Ottershaw and the blind was up (for I loved

in those days to look up at the night sky), I saw nothing of it. Yet

this strangest of all things that ever came to earth from outer space

must have fallen while I was sitting there, visible to me had I only

looked up as it passed. Some of those who saw its flight say it

travelled with a hissing sound. I myself heard nothing of that. Many

people in Berkshire, Surrey, and Middlesex must have seen the fall of

it, and, at most, have thought that another meteorite had descended. No

one seems to have troubled to look for the fallen mass that night.

But very early in the morning poor Ogilvy, who had seen the shooting

star and who was persuaded that a meteorite lay somewhere on the common

between Horsell, Ottershaw, and Woking, rose early with the idea of

finding it. Find it he did, soon after dawn, and not far from the

sand-pits. An enormous hole had been made by the impact of the

projectile, and the sand and gravel had been flung violently in every

direction over the heath, forming heaps visible a mile and a half away.

The heather was on fire eastward, and a thin blue smoke rose against

the dawn.

The Thing itself lay almost entirely buried in sand, amidst the

scattered splinters of a fir tree it had shivered to fragments in its

descent. The uncovered part had the appearance of a huge cylinder,

caked over and its outline softened by a thick scaly dun-coloured

incrustation. It had a diameter of about thirty yards. He approached

the mass, surprised at the size and more so at the shape, since most

meteorites are rounded more or less completely. It was, however, still

so hot from its flight through the air as to forbid his near approach.

A stirring noise within its cylinder he ascribed to the unequal cooling

of its surface; for at that time it had not occurred to him that it

might be hollow.

He remained standing at the edge of the pit that the Thing had made for

itself, staring at its strange appearance, astonished chiefly at its

unusual shape and colour, and dimly perceiving even then some evidence

of design in its arrival. The early morning was wonderfully still, and

the sun, just clearing the pine trees towards Weybridge, was already

warm. He did not remember hearing any birds that morning, there was

certainly no breeze stirring, and the only sounds were the faint

movements from within the cindery cylinder. He was all alone on the

common.

Then suddenly he noticed with a start that some of the grey clinker,

the ashy incrustation that covered the meteorite, was falling off the

circular edge of the end. It was dropping off in flakes and raining

down upon the sand. A large piece suddenly came off and fell with a

sharp noise that brought his heart into his mouth.

For a minute he scarcely realised what this meant, and, although the

heat was excessive, he clambered down into the pit close to the bulk to

see the Thing more clearly. He fancied even then that the cooling of

the body might account for this, but what disturbed that idea was the

fact that the ash was falling only from the end of the cylinder.

And then he perceived that, very slowly, the circular top of the

cylinder was rotating on its body. It was such a gradual movement that

he discovered it only through noticing that a black mark that had been

near him five minutes ago was now at the other side of the

circumference. Even then he scarcely understood what this indicated,

until he heard a muffled grating sound and saw the black mark jerk

forward an inch or so. Then the thing came upon him in a flash. The

cylinder was artificial—hollow—with an end that screwed out! Something

within the cylinder was unscrewing the top!

“Good heavens!” said Ogilvy. “There’s a man in it—men in it! Half

roasted to death! Trying to escape!”

At once, with a quick mental leap, he linked the Thing with the flash

upon Mars.

The thought of the confined creature was so dreadful to him that he

forgot the heat and went forward to the cylinder to help turn. But

luckily the dull radiation arrested him before he could burn his hands

on the still-glowing metal. At that he stood irresolute for a moment,

then turned, scrambled out of the pit, and set off running wildly into

Woking. The time then must have been somewhere about six o’clock. He

met a waggoner and tried to make him understand, but the tale he told

and his appearance were so wild—his hat had fallen off in the pit—that

the man simply drove on. He was equally unsuccessful with the potman

who was just unlocking the doors of the public-house by Horsell Bridge.

The fellow thought he was a lunatic at large and made an unsuccessful

attempt to shut him into the taproom. That sobered him a little; and

when he saw Henderson, the London journalist, in his garden, he called

over the palings and made himself understood.

“Henderson,” he called, “you saw that shooting star last night?”

“Well?” said Henderson.

“It’s out on Horsell Common now.”

“Good Lord!” said Henderson. “Fallen meteorite! That’s good.”

“But it’s something more than a meteorite. It’s a cylinder—an

artificial cylinder, man! And there’s something inside.”

Henderson stood up with his spade in his hand.

“What’s that?” he said. He was deaf in one ear.

Ogilvy told him all that he had seen. Henderson was a minute or so

taking it in. Then he dropped his spade, snatched up his jacket, and

came out into the road. The two men hurried back at once to the common,

and found the cylinder still lying in the same position. But now the

sounds inside had ceased, and a thin circle of bright metal showed

between the top and the body of the cylinder. Air was either entering

or escaping at the rim with a thin, sizzling sound.

They listened, rapped on the scaly burnt metal with a stick, and,

meeting with no response, they both concluded the man or men inside

must be insensible or dead.

Of course the two were quite unable to do anything. They shouted

consolation and promises, and went off back to the town again to get

help. One can imagine them, covered with sand, excited and disordered,

running up the little street in the bright sunlight just as the shop

folks were taking down their shutters and people were opening their

bedroom windows. Henderson went into the railway station at once, in

order to telegraph the news to London. The newspaper articles had

prepared men’s minds for the reception of the idea.

By eight o’clock a number of boys and unemployed men had already

started for the common to see the “dead men from Mars.” That was the

form the story took. I heard of it first from my newspaper boy about a

quarter to nine when I went out to get my \_Daily Chronicle\_. I was

naturally startled, and lost no time in going out and across the

Ottershaw bridge to the sand-pits.

III.

ON HORSELL COMMON.

I found a little crowd of perhaps twenty people surrounding the huge

hole in which the cylinder lay. I have already described the appearance

of that colossal bulk, embedded in the ground. The turf and gravel

about it seemed charred as if by a sudden explosion. No doubt its

impact had caused a flash of fire. Henderson and Ogilvy were not there.

I think they perceived that nothing was to be done for the present, and

had gone away to breakfast at Henderson’s house.

There were four or five boys sitting on the edge of the Pit, with their

feet dangling, and amusing themselves—until I stopped them—by throwing

stones at the giant mass. After I had spoken to them about it, they

began playing at “touch” in and out of the group of bystanders.

Among these were a couple of cyclists, a jobbing gardener I employed

sometimes, a girl carrying a baby, Gregg the butcher and his little

boy, and two or three loafers and golf caddies who were accustomed to

hang about the railway station. There was very little talking. Few of

the common people in England had anything but the vaguest astronomical

ideas in those days. Most of them were staring quietly at the big table

like end of the cylinder, which was still as Ogilvy and Henderson had

left it. I fancy the popular expectation of a heap of charred corpses

was disappointed at this inanimate bulk. Some went away while I was

there, and other people came. I clambered into the pit and fancied I

heard a faint movement under my feet. The top had certainly ceased to

rotate.

It was only when I got thus close to it that the strangeness of this

object was at all evident to me. At the first glance it was really no

more exciting than an overturned carriage or a tree blown across the

road. Not so much so, indeed. It looked like a rusty gas float. It

required a certain amount of scientific education to perceive that the

grey scale of the Thing was no common oxide, that the yellowish-white

metal that gleamed in the crack between the lid and the cylinder had an

unfamiliar hue. “Extra-terrestrial” had no meaning for most of the

onlookers.

At that time it was quite clear in my own mind that the Thing had come

from the planet Mars, but I judged it improbable that it contained any

living creature. I thought the unscrewing might be automatic. In spite

of Ogilvy, I still believed that there were men in Mars. My mind ran

fancifully on the possibilities of its containing manuscript, on the

difficulties in translation that might arise, whether we should find

coins and models in it, and so forth. Yet it was a little too large for

assurance on this idea. I felt an impatience to see it opened. About

eleven, as nothing seemed happening, I walked back, full of such

thought, to my home in Maybury. But I found it difficult to get to work

upon my abstract investigations.

In the afternoon the appearance of the common had altered very much.

The early editions of the evening papers had startled London with

enormous headlines:

“A MESSAGE RECEIVED FROM MARS.”

“REMARKABLE STORY FROM WOKING,”

and so forth. In addition, Ogilvy’s wire to the Astronomical Exchange

had roused every observatory in the three kingdoms.

There were half a dozen flys or more from the Woking station standing

in the road by the sand-pits, a basket-chaise from Chobham, and a

rather lordly carriage. Besides that, there was quite a heap of

bicycles. In addition, a large number of people must have walked, in

spite of the heat of the day, from Woking and Chertsey, so that there

was altogether quite a considerable crowd—one or two gaily dressed

ladies among the others.

It was glaringly hot, not a cloud in the sky nor a breath of wind, and

the only shadow was that of the few scattered pine trees. The burning

heather had been extinguished, but the level ground towards Ottershaw

was blackened as far as one could see, and still giving off vertical

streamers of smoke. An enterprising sweet-stuff dealer in the Chobham

Road had sent up his son with a barrow-load of green apples and ginger

beer.

Going to the edge of the pit, I found it occupied by a group of about

half a dozen men—Henderson, Ogilvy, and a tall, fair-haired man that I

afterwards learned was Stent, the Astronomer Royal, with several

workmen wielding spades and pickaxes. Stent was giving directions in a

clear, high-pitched voice. He was standing on the cylinder, which was

now evidently much cooler; his face was crimson and streaming with

perspiration, and something seemed to have irritated him.

A large portion of the cylinder had been uncovered, though its lower

end was still embedded. As soon as Ogilvy saw me among the staring

crowd on the edge of the pit he called to me to come down, and asked me

if I would mind going over to see Lord Hilton, the lord of the manor.

The growing crowd, he said, was becoming a serious impediment to their

excavations, especially the boys. They wanted a light railing put up,

and help to keep the people back. He told me that a faint stirring was

occasionally still audible within the case, but that the workmen had

failed to unscrew the top, as it afforded no grip to them. The case

appeared to be enormously thick, and it was possible that the faint

sounds we heard represented a noisy tumult in the interior.

I was very glad to do as he asked, and so become one of the privileged

spectators within the contemplated enclosure. I failed to find Lord

Hilton at his house, but I was told he was expected from London by the

six o’clock train from Waterloo; and as it was then about a quarter

past five, I went home, had some tea, and walked up to the station to

waylay him.

IV.

THE CYLINDER OPENS.

When I returned to the common the sun was setting. Scattered groups

were hurrying from the direction of Woking, and one or two persons were

returning. The crowd about the pit had increased, and stood out black

against the lemon yellow of the sky—a couple of hundred people,

perhaps. There were raised voices, and some sort of struggle appeared

to be going on about the pit. Strange imaginings passed through my

mind. As I drew nearer I heard Stent’s voice:

“Keep back! Keep back!”

A boy came running towards me.

“It’s a-movin’,” he said to me as he passed; “a-screwin’ and a-screwin’

out. I don’t like it. I’m a-goin’ ’ome, I am.”

I went on to the crowd. There were really, I should think, two or three

hundred people elbowing and jostling one another, the one or two ladies

there being by no means the least active.

“He’s fallen in the pit!” cried some one.

“Keep back!” said several.

The crowd swayed a little, and I elbowed my way through. Every one

seemed greatly excited. I heard a peculiar humming sound from the pit.

“I say!” said Ogilvy; “help keep these idiots back. We don’t know

what’s in the confounded thing, you know!”

I saw a young man, a shop assistant in Woking I believe he was,

standing on the cylinder and trying to scramble out of the hole again.

The crowd had pushed him in.

The end of the cylinder was being screwed out from within. Nearly two

feet of shining screw projected. Somebody blundered against me, and I

narrowly missed being pitched onto the top of the screw. I turned, and

as I did so the screw must have come out, for the lid of the cylinder

fell upon the gravel with a ringing concussion. I stuck my elbow into

the person behind me, and turned my head towards the Thing again. For a

moment that circular cavity seemed perfectly black. I had the sunset in

my eyes.

I think everyone expected to see a man emerge—possibly something a

little unlike us terrestrial men, but in all essentials a man. I know I

did. But, looking, I presently saw something stirring within the

shadow: greyish billowy movements, one above another, and then two

luminous disks—like eyes. Then something resembling a little grey

snake, about the thickness of a walking stick, coiled up out of the

writhing middle, and wriggled in the air towards me—and then another.

A sudden chill came over me. There was a loud shriek from a woman

behind. I half turned, keeping my eyes fixed upon the cylinder still,

from which other tentacles were now projecting, and began pushing my

way back from the edge of the pit. I saw astonishment giving place to

horror on the faces of the people about me. I heard inarticulate

exclamations on all sides. There was a general movement backwards. I

saw the shopman struggling still on the edge of the pit. I found myself

alone, and saw the people on the other side of the pit running off,

Stent among them. I looked again at the cylinder, and ungovernable

terror gripped me. I stood petrified and staring.

A big greyish rounded bulk, the size, perhaps, of a bear, was rising

slowly and painfully out of the cylinder. As it bulged up and caught

the light, it glistened like wet leather.

Two large dark-coloured eyes were regarding me steadfastly. The mass

that framed them, the head of the thing, was rounded, and had, one

might say, a face. There was a mouth under the eyes, the lipless brim

of which quivered and panted, and dropped saliva. The whole creature

heaved and pulsated convulsively. A lank tentacular appendage gripped

the edge of the cylinder, another swayed in the air.

Those who have never seen a living Martian can scarcely imagine the

strange horror of its appearance. The peculiar V-shaped mouth with its

pointed upper lip, the absence of brow ridges, the absence of a chin

beneath the wedgelike lower lip, the incessant quivering of this mouth,

the Gorgon groups of tentacles, the tumultuous breathing of the lungs

in a strange atmosphere, the evident heaviness and painfulness of

movement due to the greater gravitational energy of the earth—above

all, the extraordinary intensity of the immense eyes—were at once

vital, intense, inhuman, crippled and monstrous. There was something

fungoid in the oily brown skin, something in the clumsy deliberation of

the tedious movements unspeakably nasty. Even at this first encounter,

this first glimpse, I was overcome with disgust and dread.

Suddenly the monster vanished. It had toppled over the brim of the

cylinder and fallen into the pit, with a thud like the fall of a great

mass of leather. I heard it give a peculiar thick cry, and forthwith

another of these creatures appeared darkly in the deep shadow of the

aperture.

I turned and, running madly, made for the first group of trees, perhaps

a hundred yards away; but I ran slantingly and stumbling, for I could

not avert my face from these things.

There, among some young pine trees and furze bushes, I stopped,

panting, and waited further developments. The common round the

sand-pits was dotted with people, standing like myself in a

half-fascinated terror, staring at these creatures, or rather at the

heaped gravel at the edge of the pit in which they lay. And then, with

a renewed horror, I saw a round, black object bobbing up and down on

the edge of the pit. It was the head of the shopman who had fallen in,

but showing as a little black object against the hot western sun. Now

he got his shoulder and knee up, and again he seemed to slip back until

only his head was visible. Suddenly he vanished, and I could have

fancied a faint shriek had reached me. I had a momentary impulse to go

back and help him that my fears overruled.

Everything was then quite invisible, hidden by the deep pit and the

heap of sand that the fall of the cylinder had made. Anyone coming

along the road from Chobham or Woking would have been amazed at the

sight—a dwindling multitude of perhaps a hundred people or more

standing in a great irregular circle, in ditches, behind bushes, behind

gates and hedges, saying little to one another and that in short,

excited shouts, and staring, staring hard at a few heaps of sand. The

barrow of ginger beer stood, a queer derelict, black against the

burning sky, and in the sand-pits was a row of deserted vehicles with

their horses feeding out of nosebags or pawing the ground.

V.

THE HEAT-RAY.

After the glimpse I had had of the Martians emerging from the cylinder

in which they had come to the earth from their planet, a kind of

fascination paralysed my actions. I remained standing knee-deep in the

heather, staring at the mound that hid them. I was a battleground of

fear and curiosity.

I did not dare to go back towards the pit, but I felt a passionate

longing to peer into it. I began walking, therefore, in a big curve,

seeking some point of vantage and continually looking at the sand-heaps

that hid these new-comers to our earth. Once a leash of thin black

whips, like the arms of an octopus, flashed across the sunset and was

immediately withdrawn, and afterwards a thin rod rose up, joint by

joint, bearing at its apex a circular disk that spun with a wobbling

motion. What could be going on there?

Most of the spectators had gathered in one or two groups—one a little

crowd towards Woking, the other a knot of people in the direction of

Chobham. Evidently they shared my mental conflict. There were few near

me. One man I approached—he was, I perceived, a neighbour of mine,

though I did not know his name—and accosted. But it was scarcely a time

for articulate conversation.

“What ugly \_brutes\_!” he said. “Good God! What ugly brutes!” He

repeated this over and over again.

“Did you see a man in the pit?” I said; but he made no answer to that.

We became silent, and stood watching for a time side by side, deriving,

I fancy, a certain comfort in one another’s company. Then I shifted my

position to a little knoll that gave me the advantage of a yard or more

of elevation and when I looked for him presently he was walking towards

Woking.

The sunset faded to twilight before anything further happened. The

crowd far away on the left, towards Woking, seemed to grow, and I heard

now a faint murmur from it. The little knot of people towards Chobham

dispersed. There was scarcely an intimation of movement from the pit.

It was this, as much as anything, that gave people courage, and I

suppose the new arrivals from Woking also helped to restore confidence.

At any rate, as the dusk came on a slow, intermittent movement upon the

sand-pits began, a movement that seemed to gather force as the

stillness of the evening about the cylinder remained unbroken. Vertical

black figures in twos and threes would advance, stop, watch, and

advance again, spreading out as they did so in a thin irregular

crescent that promised to enclose the pit in its attenuated horns. I,

too, on my side began to move towards the pit.

Then I saw some cabmen and others had walked boldly into the sand-pits,

and heard the clatter of hoofs and the gride of wheels. I saw a lad

trundling off the barrow of apples. And then, within thirty yards of

the pit, advancing from the direction of Horsell, I noted a little

black knot of men, the foremost of whom was waving a white flag.

This was the Deputation. There had been a hasty consultation, and since

the Martians were evidently, in spite of their repulsive forms,

intelligent creatures, it had been resolved to show them, by

approaching them with signals, that we too were intelligent.

Flutter, flutter, went the flag, first to the right, then to the left.

It was too far for me to recognise anyone there, but afterwards I

learned that Ogilvy, Stent, and Henderson were with others in this

attempt at communication. This little group had in its advance dragged

inward, so to speak, the circumference of the now almost complete

circle of people, and a number of dim black figures followed it at

discreet distances.

Suddenly there was a flash of light, and a quantity of luminous

greenish smoke came out of the pit in three distinct puffs, which drove

up, one after the other, straight into the still air.

This smoke (or flame, perhaps, would be the better word for it) was so

bright that the deep blue sky overhead and the hazy stretches of brown

common towards Chertsey, set with black pine trees, seemed to darken

abruptly as these puffs arose, and to remain the darker after their

dispersal. At the same time a faint hissing sound became audible.

Beyond the pit stood the little wedge of people with the white flag at

its apex, arrested by these phenomena, a little knot of small vertical

black shapes upon the black ground. As the green smoke arose, their

faces flashed out pallid green, and faded again as it vanished. Then

slowly the hissing passed into a humming, into a long, loud, droning

noise. Slowly a humped shape rose out of the pit, and the ghost of a

beam of light seemed to flicker out from it.

Forthwith flashes of actual flame, a bright glare leaping from one to

another, sprang from the scattered group of men. It was as if some

invisible jet impinged upon them and flashed into white flame. It was

as if each man were suddenly and momentarily turned to fire.

Then, by the light of their own destruction, I saw them staggering and

falling, and their supporters turning to run.

I stood staring, not as yet realising that this was death leaping from

man to man in that little distant crowd. All I felt was that it was

something very strange. An almost noiseless and blinding flash of

light, and a man fell headlong and lay still; and as the unseen shaft

of heat passed over them, pine trees burst into fire, and every dry

furze bush became with one dull thud a mass of flames. And far away

towards Knaphill I saw the flashes of trees and hedges and wooden

buildings suddenly set alight.

It was sweeping round swiftly and steadily, this flaming death, this

invisible, inevitable sword of heat. I perceived it coming towards me

by the flashing bushes it touched, and was too astounded and stupefied

to stir. I heard the crackle of fire in the sand-pits and the sudden

squeal of a horse that was as suddenly stilled. Then it was as if an

invisible yet intensely heated finger were drawn through the heather

between me and the Martians, and all along a curving line beyond the

sand-pits the dark ground smoked and crackled. Something fell with a

crash far away to the left where the road from Woking station opens out

on the common. Forth-with the hissing and humming ceased, and the

black, dome-like object sank slowly out of sight into the pit.

All this had happened with such swiftness that I had stood motionless,

dumbfounded and dazzled by the flashes of light. Had that death swept

through a full circle, it must inevitably have slain me in my surprise.

But it passed and spared me, and left the night about me suddenly dark

and unfamiliar.

The undulating common seemed now dark almost to blackness, except where

its roadways lay grey and pale under the deep blue sky of the early

night. It was dark, and suddenly void of men. Overhead the stars were

mustering, and in the west the sky was still a pale, bright, almost

greenish blue. The tops of the pine trees and the roofs of Horsell came

out sharp and black against the western afterglow. The Martians and

their appliances were altogether invisible, save for that thin mast

upon which their restless mirror wobbled. Patches of bush and isolated

trees here and there smoked and glowed still, and the houses towards

Woking station were sending up spires of flame into the stillness of

the evening air.

Nothing was changed save for that and a terrible astonishment. The

little group of black specks with the flag of white had been swept out

of existence, and the stillness of the evening, so it seemed to me, had

scarcely been broken.

It came to me that I was upon this dark common, helpless, unprotected,

and alone. Suddenly, like a thing falling upon me from without,

came—fear.

With an effort I turned and began a stumbling run through the heather.

The fear I felt was no rational fear, but a panic terror not only of

the Martians, but of the dusk and stillness all about me. Such an

extraordinary effect in unmanning me it had that I ran weeping silently

as a child might do. Once I had turned, I did not dare to look back.

I remember I felt an extraordinary persuasion that I was being played

with, that presently, when I was upon the very verge of safety, this

mysterious death—as swift as the passage of light—would leap after me

from the pit about the cylinder, and strike me down.

VI.

THE HEAT-RAY IN THE CHOBHAM ROAD.

It is still a matter of wonder how the Martians are able to slay men so

swiftly and so silently. Many think that in some way they are able to

generate an intense heat in a chamber of practically absolute

non-conductivity. This intense heat they project in a parallel beam

against any object they choose, by means of a polished parabolic mirror

of unknown composition, much as the parabolic mirror of a lighthouse

projects a beam of light. But no one has absolutely proved these

details. However it is done, it is certain that a beam of heat is the

essence of the matter. Heat, and invisible, instead of visible, light.

Whatever is combustible flashes into flame at its touch, lead runs like

water, it softens iron, cracks and melts glass, and when it falls upon

water, incontinently that explodes into steam.

That night nearly forty people lay under the starlight about the pit,

charred and distorted beyond recognition, and all night long the common

from Horsell to Maybury was deserted and brightly ablaze.

The news of the massacre probably reached Chobham, Woking, and

Ottershaw about the same time. In Woking the shops had closed when the

tragedy happened, and a number of people, shop people and so forth,

attracted by the stories they had heard, were walking over the Horsell

Bridge and along the road between the hedges that runs out at last upon

the common. You may imagine the young people brushed up after the

labours of the day, and making this novelty, as they would make any

novelty, the excuse for walking together and enjoying a trivial

flirtation. You may figure to yourself the hum of voices along the road

in the gloaming. . . .

As yet, of course, few people in Woking even knew that the cylinder had

opened, though poor Henderson had sent a messenger on a bicycle to the

post office with a special wire to an evening paper.

As these folks came out by twos and threes upon the open, they found

little knots of people talking excitedly and peering at the spinning

mirror over the sand-pits, and the newcomers were, no doubt, soon

infected by the excitement of the occasion.

By half past eight, when the Deputation was destroyed, there may have

been a crowd of three hundred people or more at this place, besides

those who had left the road to approach the Martians nearer. There were

three policemen too, one of whom was mounted, doing their best, under

instructions from Stent, to keep the people back and deter them from

approaching the cylinder. There was some booing from those more

thoughtless and excitable souls to whom a crowd is always an occasion

for noise and horse-play.

Stent and Ogilvy, anticipating some possibilities of a collision, had

telegraphed from Horsell to the barracks as soon as the Martians

emerged, for the help of a company of soldiers to protect these strange

creatures from violence. After that they returned to lead that

ill-fated advance. The description of their death, as it was seen by

the crowd, tallies very closely with my own impressions: the three

puffs of green smoke, the deep humming note, and the flashes of flame.

But that crowd of people had a far narrower escape than mine. Only the

fact that a hummock of heathery sand intercepted the lower part of the

Heat-Ray saved them. Had the elevation of the parabolic mirror been a

few yards higher, none could have lived to tell the tale. They saw the

flashes and the men falling and an invisible hand, as it were, lit the

bushes as it hurried towards them through the twilight. Then, with a

whistling note that rose above the droning of the pit, the beam swung

close over their heads, lighting the tops of the beech trees that line

the road, and splitting the bricks, smashing the windows, firing the

window frames, and bringing down in crumbling ruin a portion of the

gable of the house nearest the corner.

In the sudden thud, hiss, and glare of the igniting trees, the

panic-stricken crowd seems to have swayed hesitatingly for some

moments. Sparks and burning twigs began to fall into the road, and

single leaves like puffs of flame. Hats and dresses caught fire. Then

came a crying from the common. There were shrieks and shouts, and

suddenly a mounted policeman came galloping through the confusion with

his hands clasped over his head, screaming.

“They’re coming!” a woman shrieked, and incontinently everyone was

turning and pushing at those behind, in order to clear their way to

Woking again. They must have bolted as blindly as a flock of sheep.

Where the road grows narrow and black between the high banks the crowd

jammed, and a desperate struggle occurred. All that crowd did not

escape; three persons at least, two women and a little boy, were

crushed and trampled there, and left to die amid the terror and the

darkness.

VII.

HOW I REACHED HOME.

For my own part, I remember nothing of my flight except the stress of

blundering against trees and stumbling through the heather. All about

me gathered the invisible terrors of the Martians; that pitiless sword

of heat seemed whirling to and fro, flourishing overhead before it

descended and smote me out of life. I came into the road between the

crossroads and Horsell, and ran along this to the crossroads.

At last I could go no further; I was exhausted with the violence of my

emotion and of my flight, and I staggered and fell by the wayside. That

was near the bridge that crosses the canal by the gasworks. I fell and

lay still.

I must have remained there some time.

I sat up, strangely perplexed. For a moment, perhaps, I could not

clearly understand how I came there. My terror had fallen from me like

a garment. My hat had gone, and my collar had burst away from its

fastener. A few minutes before, there had only been three real things

before me—the immensity of the night and space and nature, my own

feebleness and anguish, and the near approach of death. Now it was as

if something turned over, and the point of view altered abruptly. There

was no sensible transition from one state of mind to the other. I was

immediately the self of every day again—a decent, ordinary citizen. The

silent common, the impulse of my flight, the starting flames, were as

if they had been in a dream. I asked myself had these latter things

indeed happened? I could not credit it.

I rose and walked unsteadily up the steep incline of the bridge. My

mind was blank wonder. My muscles and nerves seemed drained of their

strength. I dare say I staggered drunkenly. A head rose over the arch,

and the figure of a workman carrying a basket appeared. Beside him ran

a little boy. He passed me, wishing me good night. I was minded to

speak to him, but did not. I answered his greeting with a meaningless

mumble and went on over the bridge.

Over the Maybury arch a train, a billowing tumult of white, firelit

smoke, and a long caterpillar of lighted windows, went flying

south—clatter, clatter, clap, rap, and it had gone. A dim group of

people talked in the gate of one of the houses in the pretty little row

of gables that was called Oriental Terrace. It was all so real and so

familiar. And that behind me! It was frantic, fantastic! Such things, I

told myself, could not be.

Perhaps I am a man of exceptional moods. I do not know how far my

experience is common. At times I suffer from the strangest sense of

detachment from myself and the world about me; I seem to watch it all

from the outside, from somewhere inconceivably remote, out of time, out

of space, out of the stress and tragedy of it all. This feeling was

very strong upon me that night. Here was another side to my dream.

But the trouble was the blank incongruity of this serenity and the

swift death flying yonder, not two miles away. There was a noise of

business from the gasworks, and the electric lamps were all alight. I

stopped at the group of people.

“What news from the common?” said I.

There were two men and a woman at the gate.

“Eh?” said one of the men, turning.

“What news from the common?” I said.

“Ain’t yer just \_been\_ there?” asked the men.

“People seem fair silly about the common,” said the woman over the

gate. “What’s it all abart?”

“Haven’t you heard of the men from Mars?” said I; “the creatures from

Mars?”

“Quite enough,” said the woman over the gate. “Thenks”; and all three

of them laughed.

I felt foolish and angry. I tried and found I could not tell them what

I had seen. They laughed again at my broken sentences.

“You’ll hear more yet,” I said, and went on to my home.

I startled my wife at the doorway, so haggard was I. I went into the

dining room, sat down, drank some wine, and so soon as I could collect

myself sufficiently I told her the things I had seen. The dinner, which

was a cold one, had already been served, and remained neglected on the

table while I told my story.

“There is one thing,” I said, to allay the fears I had aroused; “they

are the most sluggish things I ever saw crawl. They may keep the pit

and kill people who come near them, but they cannot get out of it. . .

. But the horror of them!”

“Don’t, dear!” said my wife, knitting her brows and putting her hand on

mine.

“Poor Ogilvy!” I said. “To think he may be lying dead there!”

My wife at least did not find my experience incredible. When I saw how

deadly white her face was, I ceased abruptly.

“They may come here,” she said again and again.

I pressed her to take wine, and tried to reassure her.

“They can scarcely move,” I said.

I began to comfort her and myself by repeating all that Ogilvy had told

me of the impossibility of the Martians establishing themselves on the

earth. In particular I laid stress on the gravitational difficulty. On

the surface of the earth the force of gravity is three times what it is

on the surface of Mars. A Martian, therefore, would weigh three times

more than on Mars, albeit his muscular strength would be the same. His

own body would be a cope of lead to him, therefore. That, indeed, was

the general opinion. Both \_The Times\_ and the \_Daily Telegraph\_, for

instance, insisted on it the next morning, and both overlooked, just as

I did, two obvious modifying influences.

The atmosphere of the earth, we now know, contains far more oxygen or

far less argon (whichever way one likes to put it) than does Mars’. The

invigorating influences of this excess of oxygen upon the Martians

indisputably did much to counterbalance the increased weight of their

bodies. And, in the second place, we all overlooked the fact that such

mechanical intelligence as the Martian possessed was quite able to

dispense with muscular exertion at a pinch.

But I did not consider these points at the time, and so my reasoning

was dead against the chances of the invaders. With wine and food, the

confidence of my own table, and the necessity of reassuring my wife, I

grew by insensible degrees courageous and secure.

“They have done a foolish thing,” said I, fingering my wineglass. “They

are dangerous because, no doubt, they are mad with terror. Perhaps they

expected to find no living things—certainly no intelligent living

things.”

“A shell in the pit,” said I, “if the worst comes to the worst, will

kill them all.”

The intense excitement of the events had no doubt left my perceptive

powers in a state of erethism. I remember that dinner table with

extraordinary vividness even now. My dear wife’s sweet anxious face

peering at me from under the pink lamp shade, the white cloth with its

silver and glass table furniture—for in those days even philosophical

writers had many little luxuries—the crimson-purple wine in my glass,

are photographically distinct. At the end of it I sat, tempering nuts

with a cigarette, regretting Ogilvy’s rashness, and denouncing the

short-sighted timidity of the Martians.

So some respectable dodo in the Mauritius might have lorded it in his

nest, and discussed the arrival of that shipful of pitiless sailors in

want of animal food. “We will peck them to death tomorrow, my dear.”

I did not know it, but that was the last civilised dinner I was to eat

for very many strange and terrible days.

VIII.

FRIDAY NIGHT.

The most extraordinary thing to my mind, of all the strange and

wonderful things that happened upon that Friday, was the dovetailing of

the commonplace habits of our social order with the first beginnings of

the series of events that was to topple that social order headlong. If

on Friday night you had taken a pair of compasses and drawn a circle

with a radius of five miles round the Woking sand-pits, I doubt if you

would have had one human being outside it, unless it were some relation

of Stent or of the three or four cyclists or London people lying dead

on the common, whose emotions or habits were at all affected by the

new-comers. Many people had heard of the cylinder, of course, and

talked about it in their leisure, but it certainly did not make the

sensation that an ultimatum to Germany would have done.

In London that night poor Henderson’s telegram describing the gradual

unscrewing of the shot was judged to be a canard, and his evening

paper, after wiring for authentication from him and receiving no

reply—the man was killed—decided not to print a special edition.

Even within the five-mile circle the great majority of people were

inert. I have already described the behaviour of the men and women to

whom I spoke. All over the district people were dining and supping;

working men were gardening after the labours of the day, children were

being put to bed, young people were wandering through the lanes

love-making, students sat over their books.

Maybe there was a murmur in the village streets, a novel and dominant

topic in the public-houses, and here and there a messenger, or even an

eye-witness of the later occurrences, caused a whirl of excitement, a

shouting, and a running to and fro; but for the most part the daily

routine of working, eating, drinking, sleeping, went on as it had done

for countless years—as though no planet Mars existed in the sky. Even

at Woking station and Horsell and Chobham that was the case.

In Woking junction, until a late hour, trains were stopping and going

on, others were shunting on the sidings, passengers were alighting and

waiting, and everything was proceeding in the most ordinary way. A boy

from the town, trenching on Smith’s monopoly, was selling papers with

the afternoon’s news. The ringing impact of trucks, the sharp whistle

of the engines from the junction, mingled with their shouts of “Men

from Mars!” Excited men came into the station about nine o’clock with

incredible tidings, and caused no more disturbance than drunkards might

have done. People rattling Londonwards peered into the darkness outside

the carriage windows, and saw only a rare, flickering, vanishing spark

dance up from the direction of Horsell, a red glow and a thin veil of

smoke driving across the stars, and thought that nothing more serious

than a heath fire was happening. It was only round the edge of the

common that any disturbance was perceptible. There were half a dozen

villas burning on the Woking border. There were lights in all the

houses on the common side of the three villages, and the people there

kept awake till dawn.

A curious crowd lingered restlessly, people coming and going but the

crowd remaining, both on the Chobham and Horsell bridges. One or two

adventurous souls, it was afterwards found, went into the darkness and

crawled quite near the Martians; but they never returned, for now and

again a light-ray, like the beam of a warship’s searchlight swept the

common, and the Heat-Ray was ready to follow. Save for such, that big

area of common was silent and desolate, and the charred bodies lay

about on it all night under the stars, and all the next day. A noise of

hammering from the pit was heard by many people.

So you have the state of things on Friday night. In the centre,

sticking into the skin of our old planet Earth like a poisoned dart,

was this cylinder. But the poison was scarcely working yet. Around it

was a patch of silent common, smouldering in places, and with a few

dark, dimly seen objects lying in contorted attitudes here and there.

Here and there was a burning bush or tree. Beyond was a fringe of

excitement, and farther than that fringe the inflammation had not crept

as yet. In the rest of the world the stream of life still flowed as it

had flowed for immemorial years. The fever of war that would presently

clog vein and artery, deaden nerve and destroy brain, had still to

develop.

All night long the Martians were hammering and stirring, sleepless,

indefatigable, at work upon the machines they were making ready, and

ever and again a puff of greenish-white smoke whirled up to the starlit

sky.

About eleven a company of soldiers came through Horsell, and deployed

along the edge of the common to form a cordon. Later a second company

marched through Chobham to deploy on the north side of the common.

Several officers from the Inkerman barracks had been on the common

earlier in the day, and one, Major Eden, was reported to be missing.

The colonel of the regiment came to the Chobham bridge and was busy

questioning the crowd at midnight. The military authorities were

certainly alive to the seriousness of the business. About eleven, the

next morning’s papers were able to say, a squadron of hussars, two

Maxims, and about four hundred men of the Cardigan regiment started

from Aldershot.

A few seconds after midnight the crowd in the Chertsey road, Woking,

saw a star fall from heaven into the pine woods to the northwest. It

had a greenish colour, and caused a silent brightness like summer

lightning. This was the second cylinder.

IX.

THE FIGHTING BEGINS.

Saturday lives in my memory as a day of suspense. It was a day of

lassitude too, hot and close, with, I am told, a rapidly fluctuating

barometer. I had slept but little, though my wife had succeeded in

sleeping, and I rose early. I went into my garden before breakfast and

stood listening, but towards the common there was nothing stirring but

a lark.

The milkman came as usual. I heard the rattle of his chariot and I went

round to the side gate to ask the latest news. He told me that during

the night the Martians had been surrounded by troops, and that guns

were expected. Then—a familiar, reassuring note—I heard a train running

towards Woking.

“They aren’t to be killed,” said the milkman, “if that can possibly be

avoided.”

I saw my neighbour gardening, chatted with him for a time, and then

strolled in to breakfast. It was a most unexceptional morning. My

neighbour was of opinion that the troops would be able to capture or to

destroy the Martians during the day.

“It’s a pity they make themselves so unapproachable,” he said. “It

would be curious to know how they live on another planet; we might

learn a thing or two.”

He came up to the fence and extended a handful of strawberries, for his

gardening was as generous as it was enthusiastic. At the same time he

told me of the burning of the pine woods about the Byfleet Golf Links.

“They say,” said he, “that there’s another of those blessed things

fallen there—number two. But one’s enough, surely. This lot’ll cost the

insurance people a pretty penny before everything’s settled.” He

laughed with an air of the greatest good humour as he said this. The

woods, he said, were still burning, and pointed out a haze of smoke to

me. “They will be hot under foot for days, on account of the thick soil

of pine needles and turf,” he said, and then grew serious over “poor

Ogilvy.”

After breakfast, instead of working, I decided to walk down towards the

common. Under the railway bridge I found a group of soldiers—sappers, I

think, men in small round caps, dirty red jackets unbuttoned, and

showing their blue shirts, dark trousers, and boots coming to the calf.

They told me no one was allowed over the canal, and, looking along the

road towards the bridge, I saw one of the Cardigan men standing

sentinel there. I talked with these soldiers for a time; I told them of

my sight of the Martians on the previous evening. None of them had seen

the Martians, and they had but the vaguest ideas of them, so that they

plied me with questions. They said that they did not know who had

authorised the movements of the troops; their idea was that a dispute

had arisen at the Horse Guards. The ordinary sapper is a great deal

better educated than the common soldier, and they discussed the

peculiar conditions of the possible fight with some acuteness. I

described the Heat-Ray to them, and they began to argue among

themselves.

“Crawl up under cover and rush ’em, say I,” said one.

“Get aht!” said another. “What’s cover against this ’ere ’eat? Sticks

to cook yer! What we got to do is to go as near as the ground’ll let

us, and then drive a trench.”

“Blow yer trenches! You always want trenches; you ought to ha’ been

born a rabbit Snippy.”

“Ain’t they got any necks, then?” said a third, abruptly—a little,

contemplative, dark man, smoking a pipe.

I repeated my description.

“Octopuses,” said he, “that’s what I calls ’em. Talk about fishers of

men—fighters of fish it is this time!”

“It ain’t no murder killing beasts like that,” said the first speaker.

“Why not shell the darned things strite off and finish ’em?” said the

little dark man. “You carn tell what they might do.”

“Where’s your shells?” said the first speaker. “There ain’t no time. Do

it in a rush, that’s my tip, and do it at once.”

So they discussed it. After a while I left them, and went on to the

railway station to get as many morning papers as I could.

But I will not weary the reader with a description of that long morning

and of the longer afternoon. I did not succeed in getting a glimpse of

the common, for even Horsell and Chobham church towers were in the

hands of the military authorities. The soldiers I addressed didn’t know

anything; the officers were mysterious as well as busy. I found people

in the town quite secure again in the presence of the military, and I

heard for the first time from Marshall, the tobacconist, that his son

was among the dead on the common. The soldiers had made the people on

the outskirts of Horsell lock up and leave their houses.

I got back to lunch about two, very tired for, as I have said, the day

was extremely hot and dull; and in order to refresh myself I took a

cold bath in the afternoon. About half past four I went up to the

railway station to get an evening paper, for the morning papers had

contained only a very inaccurate description of the killing of Stent,

Henderson, Ogilvy, and the others. But there was little I didn’t know.

The Martians did not show an inch of themselves. They seemed busy in

their pit, and there was a sound of hammering and an almost continuous

streamer of smoke. Apparently they were busy getting ready for a

struggle. “Fresh attempts have been made to signal, but without

success,” was the stereotyped formula of the papers. A sapper told me

it was done by a man in a ditch with a flag on a long pole. The

Martians took as much notice of such advances as we should of the

lowing of a cow.

I must confess the sight of all this armament, all this preparation,

greatly excited me. My imagination became belligerent, and defeated the

invaders in a dozen striking ways; something of my schoolboy dreams of

battle and heroism came back. It hardly seemed a fair fight to me at

that time. They seemed very helpless in that pit of theirs.

About three o’clock there began the thud of a gun at measured intervals

from Chertsey or Addlestone. I learned that the smouldering pine wood

into which the second cylinder had fallen was being shelled, in the

hope of destroying that object before it opened. It was only about

five, however, that a field gun reached Chobham for use against the

first body of Martians.

About six in the evening, as I sat at tea with my wife in the

summerhouse talking vigorously about the battle that was lowering upon

us, I heard a muffled detonation from the common, and immediately after

a gust of firing. Close on the heels of that came a violent rattling

crash, quite close to us, that shook the ground; and, starting out upon

the lawn, I saw the tops of the trees about the Oriental College burst

into smoky red flame, and the tower of the little church beside it

slide down into ruin. The pinnacle of the mosque had vanished, and the

roof line of the college itself looked as if a hundred-ton gun had been

at work upon it. One of our chimneys cracked as if a shot had hit it,

flew, and a piece of it came clattering down the tiles and made a heap

of broken red fragments upon the flower bed by my study window.

I and my wife stood amazed. Then I realised that the crest of Maybury

Hill must be within range of the Martians’ Heat-Ray now that the

college was cleared out of the way.

At that I gripped my wife’s arm, and without ceremony ran her out into

the road. Then I fetched out the servant, telling her I would go

upstairs myself for the box she was clamouring for.

“We can’t possibly stay here,” I said; and as I spoke the firing

reopened for a moment upon the common.

“But where are we to go?” said my wife in terror.

I thought perplexed. Then I remembered her cousins at Leatherhead.

“Leatherhead!” I shouted above the sudden noise.

She looked away from me downhill. The people were coming out of their

houses, astonished.

“How are we to get to Leatherhead?” she said.

Down the hill I saw a bevy of hussars ride under the railway bridge;

three galloped through the open gates of the Oriental College; two

others dismounted, and began running from house to house. The sun,

shining through the smoke that drove up from the tops of the trees,

seemed blood red, and threw an unfamiliar lurid light upon everything.

“Stop here,” said I; “you are safe here”; and I started off at once for

the Spotted Dog, for I knew the landlord had a horse and dog cart. I

ran, for I perceived that in a moment everyone upon this side of the

hill would be moving. I found him in his bar, quite unaware of what was

going on behind his house. A man stood with his back to me, talking to

him.

“I must have a pound,” said the landlord, “and I’ve no one to drive

it.”

“I’ll give you two,” said I, over the stranger’s shoulder.

“What for?”

“And I’ll bring it back by midnight,” I said.

“Lord!” said the landlord; “what’s the hurry? I’m selling my bit of a

pig. Two pounds, and you bring it back? What’s going on now?”

I explained hastily that I had to leave my home, and so secured the dog

cart. At the time it did not seem to me nearly so urgent that the

landlord should leave his. I took care to have the cart there and then,

drove it off down the road, and, leaving it in charge of my wife and

servant, rushed into my house and packed a few valuables, such plate as

we had, and so forth. The beech trees below the house were burning

while I did this, and the palings up the road glowed red. While I was

occupied in this way, one of the dismounted hussars came running up. He

was going from house to house, warning people to leave. He was going on

as I came out of my front door, lugging my treasures, done up in a

tablecloth. I shouted after him:

“What news?”

He turned, stared, bawled something about “crawling out in a thing like

a dish cover,” and ran on to the gate of the house at the crest. A

sudden whirl of black smoke driving across the road hid him for a

moment. I ran to my neighbour’s door and rapped to satisfy myself of

what I already knew, that his wife had gone to London with him and had

locked up their house. I went in again, according to my promise, to get

my servant’s box, lugged it out, clapped it beside her on the tail of

the dog cart, and then caught the reins and jumped up into the driver’s

seat beside my wife. In another moment we were clear of the smoke and

noise, and spanking down the opposite slope of Maybury Hill towards Old

Woking.

In front was a quiet sunny landscape, a wheat field ahead on either

side of the road, and the Maybury Inn with its swinging sign. I saw the

doctor’s cart ahead of me. At the bottom of the hill I turned my head

to look at the hillside I was leaving. Thick streamers of black smoke

shot with threads of red fire were driving up into the still air, and

throwing dark shadows upon the green treetops eastward. The smoke

already extended far away to the east and west—to the Byfleet pine

woods eastward, and to Woking on the west. The road was dotted with

people running towards us. And very faint now, but very distinct

through the hot, quiet air, one heard the whirr of a machine-gun that

was presently stilled, and an intermittent cracking of rifles.

Apparently the Martians were setting fire to everything within range of

their Heat-Ray.

I am not an expert driver, and I had immediately to turn my attention

to the horse. When I looked back again the second hill had hidden the

black smoke. I slashed the horse with the whip, and gave him a loose

rein until Woking and Send lay between us and that quivering tumult. I

overtook and passed the doctor between Woking and Send.

X.

IN THE STORM.

Leatherhead is about twelve miles from Maybury Hill. The scent of hay

was in the air through the lush meadows beyond Pyrford, and the hedges

on either side were sweet and gay with multitudes of dog-roses. The

heavy firing that had broken out while we were driving down Maybury

Hill ceased as abruptly as it began, leaving the evening very peaceful

and still. We got to Leatherhead without misadventure about nine

o’clock, and the horse had an hour’s rest while I took supper with my

cousins and commended my wife to their care.

My wife was curiously silent throughout the drive, and seemed oppressed

with forebodings of evil. I talked to her reassuringly, pointing out

that the Martians were tied to the pit by sheer heaviness, and at the

utmost could but crawl a little out of it; but she answered only in

monosyllables. Had it not been for my promise to the innkeeper, she

would, I think, have urged me to stay in Leatherhead that night. Would

that I had! Her face, I remember, was very white as we parted.

For my own part, I had been feverishly excited all day. Something very

like the war fever that occasionally runs through a civilised community

had got into my blood, and in my heart I was not so very sorry that I

had to return to Maybury that night. I was even afraid that that last

fusillade I had heard might mean the extermination of our invaders from

Mars. I can best express my state of mind by saying that I wanted to be

in at the death.

It was nearly eleven when I started to return. The night was

unexpectedly dark; to me, walking out of the lighted passage of my

cousins’ house, it seemed indeed black, and it was as hot and close as

the day. Overhead the clouds were driving fast, albeit not a breath

stirred the shrubs about us. My cousins’ man lit both lamps. Happily, I

knew the road intimately. My wife stood in the light of the doorway,

and watched me until I jumped up into the dog cart. Then abruptly she

turned and went in, leaving my cousins side by side wishing me good

hap.

I was a little depressed at first with the contagion of my wife’s

fears, but very soon my thoughts reverted to the Martians. At that time

I was absolutely in the dark as to the course of the evening’s

fighting. I did not know even the circumstances that had precipitated

the conflict. As I came through Ockham (for that was the way I

returned, and not through Send and Old Woking) I saw along the western

horizon a blood-red glow, which as I drew nearer, crept slowly up the

sky. The driving clouds of the gathering thunderstorm mingled there

with masses of black and red smoke.

Ripley Street was deserted, and except for a lighted window or so the

village showed not a sign of life; but I narrowly escaped an accident

at the corner of the road to Pyrford, where a knot of people stood with

their backs to me. They said nothing to me as I passed. I do not know

what they knew of the things happening beyond the hill, nor do I know

if the silent houses I passed on my way were sleeping securely, or

deserted and empty, or harassed and watching against the terror of the

night.

From Ripley until I came through Pyrford I was in the valley of the

Wey, and the red glare was hidden from me. As I ascended the little

hill beyond Pyrford Church the glare came into view again, and the

trees about me shivered with the first intimation of the storm that was

upon me. Then I heard midnight pealing out from Pyrford Church behind

me, and then came the silhouette of Maybury Hill, with its tree-tops

and roofs black and sharp against the red.

Even as I beheld this a lurid green glare lit the road about me and

showed the distant woods towards Addlestone. I felt a tug at the reins.

I saw that the driving clouds had been pierced as it were by a thread

of green fire, suddenly lighting their confusion and falling into the

field to my left. It was the third falling star!

Close on its apparition, and blindingly violet by contrast, danced out

the first lightning of the gathering storm, and the thunder burst like

a rocket overhead. The horse took the bit between his teeth and bolted.

A moderate incline runs towards the foot of Maybury Hill, and down this

we clattered. Once the lightning had begun, it went on in as rapid a

succession of flashes as I have ever seen. The thunderclaps, treading

one on the heels of another and with a strange crackling accompaniment,

sounded more like the working of a gigantic electric machine than the

usual detonating reverberations. The flickering light was blinding and

confusing, and a thin hail smote gustily at my face as I drove down the

slope.

At first I regarded little but the road before me, and then abruptly my

attention was arrested by something that was moving rapidly down the

opposite slope of Maybury Hill. At first I took it for the wet roof of

a house, but one flash following another showed it to be in swift

rolling movement. It was an elusive vision—a moment of bewildering

darkness, and then, in a flash like daylight, the red masses of the

Orphanage near the crest of the hill, the green tops of the pine trees,

and this problematical object came out clear and sharp and bright.

And this Thing I saw! How can I describe it? A monstrous tripod, higher

than many houses, striding over the young pine trees, and smashing them

aside in its career; a walking engine of glittering metal, striding now

across the heather; articulate ropes of steel dangling from it, and the

clattering tumult of its passage mingling with the riot of the thunder.

A flash, and it came out vividly, heeling over one way with two feet in

the air, to vanish and reappear almost instantly as it seemed, with the

next flash, a hundred yards nearer. Can you imagine a milking stool

tilted and bowled violently along the ground? That was the impression

those instant flashes gave. But instead of a milking stool imagine it a

great body of machinery on a tripod stand.

Then suddenly the trees in the pine wood ahead of me were parted, as

brittle reeds are parted by a man thrusting through them; they were

snapped off and driven headlong, and a second huge tripod appeared,

rushing, as it seemed, headlong towards me. And I was galloping hard to

meet it! At the sight of the second monster my nerve went altogether.

Not stopping to look again, I wrenched the horse’s head hard round to

the right and in another moment the dog cart had heeled over upon the

horse; the shafts smashed noisily, and I was flung sideways and fell

heavily into a shallow pool of water.

I crawled out almost immediately, and crouched, my feet still in the

water, under a clump of furze. The horse lay motionless (his neck was

broken, poor brute!) and by the lightning flashes I saw the black bulk

of the overturned dog cart and the silhouette of the wheel still

spinning slowly. In another moment the colossal mechanism went striding

by me, and passed uphill towards Pyrford.

Seen nearer, the Thing was incredibly strange, for it was no mere

insensate machine driving on its way. Machine it was, with a ringing

metallic pace, and long, flexible, glittering tentacles (one of which

gripped a young pine tree) swinging and rattling about its strange

body. It picked its road as it went striding along, and the brazen hood

that surmounted it moved to and fro with the inevitable suggestion of a

head looking about. Behind the main body was a huge mass of white metal

like a gigantic fisherman’s basket, and puffs of green smoke squirted

out from the joints of the limbs as the monster swept by me. And in an

instant it was gone.

So much I saw then, all vaguely for the flickering of the lightning, in

blinding highlights and dense black shadows.

As it passed it set up an exultant deafening howl that drowned the

thunder—“Aloo! Aloo!”—and in another minute it was with its companion,

half a mile away, stooping over something in the field. I have no doubt

this Thing in the field was the third of the ten cylinders they had

fired at us from Mars.

For some minutes I lay there in the rain and darkness watching, by the

intermittent light, these monstrous beings of metal moving about in the

distance over the hedge tops. A thin hail was now beginning, and as it

came and went their figures grew misty and then flashed into clearness

again. Now and then came a gap in the lightning, and the night

swallowed them up.

I was soaked with hail above and puddle water below. It was some time

before my blank astonishment would let me struggle up the bank to a

drier position, or think at all of my imminent peril.

Not far from me was a little one-roomed squatter’s hut of wood,

surrounded by a patch of potato garden. I struggled to my feet at last,

and, crouching and making use of every chance of cover, I made a run

for this. I hammered at the door, but I could not make the people hear

(if there were any people inside), and after a time I desisted, and,

availing myself of a ditch for the greater part of the way, succeeded

in crawling, unobserved by these monstrous machines, into the pine

woods towards Maybury.

Under cover of this I pushed on, wet and shivering now, towards my own

house. I walked among the trees trying to find the footpath. It was

very dark indeed in the wood, for the lightning was now becoming

infrequent, and the hail, which was pouring down in a torrent, fell in

columns through the gaps in the heavy foliage.

If I had fully realised the meaning of all the things I had seen I

should have immediately worked my way round through Byfleet to Street

Cobham, and so gone back to rejoin my wife at Leatherhead. But that

night the strangeness of things about me, and my physical wretchedness,

prevented me, for I was bruised, weary, wet to the skin, deafened and

blinded by the storm.

I had a vague idea of going on to my own house, and that was as much

motive as I had. I staggered through the trees, fell into a ditch and

bruised my knees against a plank, and finally splashed out into the

lane that ran down from the College Arms. I say splashed, for the storm

water was sweeping the sand down the hill in a muddy torrent. There in

the darkness a man blundered into me and sent me reeling back.

He gave a cry of terror, sprang sideways, and rushed on before I could

gather my wits sufficiently to speak to him. So heavy was the stress of

the storm just at this place that I had the hardest task to win my way

up the hill. I went close up to the fence on the left and worked my way

along its palings.

Near the top I stumbled upon something soft, and, by a flash of

lightning, saw between my feet a heap of black broadcloth and a pair of

boots. Before I could distinguish clearly how the man lay, the flicker

of light had passed. I stood over him waiting for the next flash. When

it came, I saw that he was a sturdy man, cheaply but not shabbily

dressed; his head was bent under his body, and he lay crumpled up close

to the fence, as though he had been flung violently against it.

Overcoming the repugnance natural to one who had never before touched a

dead body, I stooped and turned him over to feel for his heart. He was

quite dead. Apparently his neck had been broken. The lightning flashed

for a third time, and his face leaped upon me. I sprang to my feet. It

was the landlord of the Spotted Dog, whose conveyance I had taken.

I stepped over him gingerly and pushed on up the hill. I made my way by

the police station and the College Arms towards my own house. Nothing

was burning on the hillside, though from the common there still came a

red glare and a rolling tumult of ruddy smoke beating up against the

drenching hail. So far as I could see by the flashes, the houses about

me were mostly uninjured. By the College Arms a dark heap lay in the

road.

Down the road towards Maybury Bridge there were voices and the sound of

feet, but I had not the courage to shout or to go to them. I let myself

in with my latchkey, closed, locked and bolted the door, staggered to

the foot of the staircase, and sat down. My imagination was full of

those striding metallic monsters, and of the dead body smashed against

the fence.

I crouched at the foot of the staircase with my back to the wall,

shivering violently.

XI.

AT THE WINDOW.

I have already said that my storms of emotion have a trick of

exhausting themselves. After a time I discovered that I was cold and

wet, and with little pools of water about me on the stair carpet. I got

up almost mechanically, went into the dining room and drank some

whisky, and then I was moved to change my clothes.

After I had done that I went upstairs to my study, but why I did so I

do not know. The window of my study looks over the trees and the

railway towards Horsell Common. In the hurry of our departure this

window had been left open. The passage was dark, and, by contrast with

the picture the window frame enclosed, the side of the room seemed

impenetrably dark. I stopped short in the doorway.

The thunderstorm had passed. The towers of the Oriental College and the

pine trees about it had gone, and very far away, lit by a vivid red

glare, the common about the sand-pits was visible. Across the light

huge black shapes, grotesque and strange, moved busily to and fro.

It seemed indeed as if the whole country in that direction was on

fire—a broad hillside set with minute tongues of flame, swaying and

writhing with the gusts of the dying storm, and throwing a red

reflection upon the cloud scud above. Every now and then a haze of

smoke from some nearer conflagration drove across the window and hid

the Martian shapes. I could not see what they were doing, nor the clear

form of them, nor recognise the black objects they were busied upon.

Neither could I see the nearer fire, though the reflections of it

danced on the wall and ceiling of the study. A sharp, resinous tang of

burning was in the air.

I closed the door noiselessly and crept towards the window. As I did

so, the view opened out until, on the one hand, it reached to the

houses about Woking station, and on the other to the charred and

blackened pine woods of Byfleet. There was a light down below the hill,

on the railway, near the arch, and several of the houses along the

Maybury road and the streets near the station were glowing ruins. The

light upon the railway puzzled me at first; there were a black heap and

a vivid glare, and to the right of that a row of yellow oblongs. Then I

perceived this was a wrecked train, the fore part smashed and on fire,

the hinder carriages still upon the rails.

Between these three main centres of light—the houses, the train, and

the burning county towards Chobham—stretched irregular patches of dark

country, broken here and there by intervals of dimly glowing and

smoking ground. It was the strangest spectacle, that black expanse set

with fire. It reminded me, more than anything else, of the Potteries at

night. At first I could distinguish no people at all, though I peered

intently for them. Later I saw against the light of Woking station a

number of black figures hurrying one after the other across the line.

And this was the little world in which I had been living securely for

years, this fiery chaos! What had happened in the last seven hours I

still did not know; nor did I know, though I was beginning to guess,

the relation between these mechanical colossi and the sluggish lumps I

had seen disgorged from the cylinder. With a queer feeling of

impersonal interest I turned my desk chair to the window, sat down, and

stared at the blackened country, and particularly at the three gigantic

black things that were going to and fro in the glare about the

sand-pits.

They seemed amazingly busy. I began to ask myself what they could be.

Were they intelligent mechanisms? Such a thing I felt was impossible.

Or did a Martian sit within each, ruling, directing, using, much as a

man’s brain sits and rules in his body? I began to compare the things

to human machines, to ask myself for the first time in my life how an

ironclad or a steam engine would seem to an intelligent lower animal.

The storm had left the sky clear, and over the smoke of the burning

land the little fading pinpoint of Mars was dropping into the west,

when a soldier came into my garden. I heard a slight scraping at the

fence, and rousing myself from the lethargy that had fallen upon me, I

looked down and saw him dimly, clambering over the palings. At the

sight of another human being my torpor passed, and I leaned out of the

window eagerly.

“Hist!” said I, in a whisper.

He stopped astride of the fence in doubt. Then he came over and across

the lawn to the corner of the house. He bent down and stepped softly.

“Who’s there?” he said, also whispering, standing under the window and

peering up.

“Where are you going?” I asked.

“God knows.”

“Are you trying to hide?”

“That’s it.”

“Come into the house,” I said.

I went down, unfastened the door, and let him in, and locked the door

again. I could not see his face. He was hatless, and his coat was

unbuttoned.

“My God!” he said, as I drew him in.

“What has happened?” I asked.

“What hasn’t?” In the obscurity I could see he made a gesture of

despair. “They wiped us out—simply wiped us out,” he repeated again and

again.

He followed me, almost mechanically, into the dining room.

“Take some whisky,” I said, pouring out a stiff dose.

He drank it. Then abruptly he sat down before the table, put his head

on his arms, and began to sob and weep like a little boy, in a perfect

passion of emotion, while I, with a curious forgetfulness of my own

recent despair, stood beside him, wondering.

It was a long time before he could steady his nerves to answer my

questions, and then he answered perplexingly and brokenly. He was a

driver in the artillery, and had only come into action about seven. At

that time firing was going on across the common, and it was said the

first party of Martians were crawling slowly towards their second

cylinder under cover of a metal shield.

Later this shield staggered up on tripod legs and became the first of

the fighting-machines I had seen. The gun he drove had been unlimbered

near Horsell, in order to command the sand-pits, and its arrival it was

that had precipitated the action. As the limber gunners went to the

rear, his horse trod in a rabbit hole and came down, throwing him into

a depression of the ground. At the same moment the gun exploded behind

him, the ammunition blew up, there was fire all about him, and he found

himself lying under a heap of charred dead men and dead horses.

“I lay still,” he said, “scared out of my wits, with the fore quarter

of a horse atop of me. We’d been wiped out. And the smell—good God!

Like burnt meat! I was hurt across the back by the fall of the horse,

and there I had to lie until I felt better. Just like parade it had

been a minute before—then stumble, bang, swish!”

“Wiped out!” he said.

He had hid under the dead horse for a long time, peeping out furtively

across the common. The Cardigan men had tried a rush, in skirmishing

order, at the pit, simply to be swept out of existence. Then the

monster had risen to its feet and had begun to walk leisurely to and

fro across the common among the few fugitives, with its headlike hood

turning about exactly like the head of a cowled human being. A kind of

arm carried a complicated metallic case, about which green flashes

scintillated, and out of the funnel of this there smoked the Heat-Ray.

In a few minutes there was, so far as the soldier could see, not a

living thing left upon the common, and every bush and tree upon it that

was not already a blackened skeleton was burning. The hussars had been

on the road beyond the curvature of the ground, and he saw nothing of

them. He heard the Maxims rattle for a time and then become still. The

giant saved Woking station and its cluster of houses until the last;

then in a moment the Heat-Ray was brought to bear, and the town became

a heap of fiery ruins. Then the Thing shut off the Heat-Ray, and

turning its back upon the artilleryman, began to waddle away towards

the smouldering pine woods that sheltered the second cylinder. As it

did so a second glittering Titan built itself up out of the pit.

The second monster followed the first, and at that the artilleryman

began to crawl very cautiously across the hot heather ash towards

Horsell. He managed to get alive into the ditch by the side of the

road, and so escaped to Woking. There his story became ejaculatory. The

place was impassable. It seems there were a few people alive there,

frantic for the most part and many burned and scalded. He was turned

aside by the fire, and hid among some almost scorching heaps of broken

wall as one of the Martian giants returned. He saw this one pursue a

man, catch him up in one of its steely tentacles, and knock his head

against the trunk of a pine tree. At last, after nightfall, the

artilleryman made a rush for it and got over the railway embankment.

Since then he had been skulking along towards Maybury, in the hope of

getting out of danger Londonward. People were hiding in trenches and

cellars, and many of the survivors had made off towards Woking village

and Send. He had been consumed with thirst until he found one of the

water mains near the railway arch smashed, and the water bubbling out

like a spring upon the road.

That was the story I got from him, bit by bit. He grew calmer telling

me and trying to make me see the things he had seen. He had eaten no

food since midday, he told me early in his narrative, and I found some

mutton and bread in the pantry and brought it into the room. We lit no

lamp for fear of attracting the Martians, and ever and again our hands

would touch upon bread or meat. As he talked, things about us came

darkly out of the darkness, and the trampled bushes and broken rose

trees outside the window grew distinct. It would seem that a number of

men or animals had rushed across the lawn. I began to see his face,

blackened and haggard, as no doubt mine was also.

When we had finished eating we went softly upstairs to my study, and I

looked again out of the open window. In one night the valley had become

a valley of ashes. The fires had dwindled now. Where flames had been

there were now streamers of smoke; but the countless ruins of shattered

and gutted houses and blasted and blackened trees that the night had

hidden stood out now gaunt and terrible in the pitiless light of dawn.

Yet here and there some object had had the luck to escape—a white

railway signal here, the end of a greenhouse there, white and fresh

amid the wreckage. Never before in the history of warfare had

destruction been so indiscriminate and so universal. And shining with

the growing light of the east, three of the metallic giants stood about

the pit, their cowls rotating as though they were surveying the

desolation they had made.

It seemed to me that the pit had been enlarged, and ever and again

puffs of vivid green vapour streamed up and out of it towards the

brightening dawn—streamed up, whirled, broke, and vanished.

Beyond were the pillars of fire about Chobham. They became pillars of

bloodshot smoke at the first touch of day.

XII.

WHAT I SAW OF THE DESTRUCTION OF WEYBRIDGE AND SHEPPERTON.

As the dawn grew brighter we withdrew from the window from which we had

watched the Martians, and went very quietly downstairs.

The artilleryman agreed with me that the house was no place to stay in.

He proposed, he said, to make his way Londonward, and thence rejoin his

battery—No. 12, of the Horse Artillery. My plan was to return at once

to Leatherhead; and so greatly had the strength of the Martians

impressed me that I had determined to take my wife to Newhaven, and go

with her out of the country forthwith. For I already perceived clearly

that the country about London must inevitably be the scene of a

disastrous struggle before such creatures as these could be destroyed.

Between us and Leatherhead, however, lay the third cylinder, with its

guarding giants. Had I been alone, I think I should have taken my

chance and struck across country. But the artilleryman dissuaded me:

“It’s no kindness to the right sort of wife,” he said, “to make her a

widow”; and in the end I agreed to go with him, under cover of the

woods, northward as far as Street Cobham before I parted with him.

Thence I would make a big detour by Epsom to reach Leatherhead.

I should have started at once, but my companion had been in active

service and he knew better than that. He made me ransack the house for

a flask, which he filled with whisky; and we lined every available

pocket with packets of biscuits and slices of meat. Then we crept out

of the house, and ran as quickly as we could down the ill-made road by

which I had come overnight. The houses seemed deserted. In the road lay

a group of three charred bodies close together, struck dead by the

Heat-Ray; and here and there were things that people had dropped—a

clock, a slipper, a silver spoon, and the like poor valuables. At the

corner turning up towards the post office a little cart, filled with

boxes and furniture, and horseless, heeled over on a broken wheel. A

cash box had been hastily smashed open and thrown under the debris.

Except the lodge at the Orphanage, which was still on fire, none of the

houses had suffered very greatly here. The Heat-Ray had shaved the

chimney tops and passed. Yet, save ourselves, there did not seem to be

a living soul on Maybury Hill. The majority of the inhabitants had

escaped, I suppose, by way of the Old Woking road—the road I had taken

when I drove to Leatherhead—or they had hidden.

We went down the lane, by the body of the man in black, sodden now from

the overnight hail, and broke into the woods at the foot of the hill.

We pushed through these towards the railway without meeting a soul. The

woods across the line were but the scarred and blackened ruins of

woods; for the most part the trees had fallen, but a certain proportion

still stood, dismal grey stems, with dark brown foliage instead of

green.

On our side the fire had done no more than scorch the nearer trees; it

had failed to secure its footing. In one place the woodmen had been at

work on Saturday; trees, felled and freshly trimmed, lay in a clearing,

with heaps of sawdust by the sawing-machine and its engine. Hard by was

a temporary hut, deserted. There was not a breath of wind this morning,

and everything was strangely still. Even the birds were hushed, and as

we hurried along I and the artilleryman talked in whispers and looked

now and again over our shoulders. Once or twice we stopped to listen.

After a time we drew near the road, and as we did so we heard the

clatter of hoofs and saw through the tree stems three cavalry soldiers

riding slowly towards Woking. We hailed them, and they halted while we

hurried towards them. It was a lieutenant and a couple of privates of

the 8th Hussars, with a stand like a theodolite, which the artilleryman

told me was a heliograph.

“You are the first men I’ve seen coming this way this morning,” said

the lieutenant. “What’s brewing?”

His voice and face were eager. The men behind him stared curiously. The

artilleryman jumped down the bank into the road and saluted.

“Gun destroyed last night, sir. Have been hiding. Trying to rejoin

battery, sir. You’ll come in sight of the Martians, I expect, about

half a mile along this road.”

“What the dickens are they like?” asked the lieutenant.

“Giants in armour, sir. Hundred feet high. Three legs and a body like

’luminium, with a mighty great head in a hood, sir.”

“Get out!” said the lieutenant. “What confounded nonsense!”

“You’ll see, sir. They carry a kind of box, sir, that shoots fire and

strikes you dead.”

“What d’ye mean—a gun?”

“No, sir,” and the artilleryman began a vivid account of the Heat-Ray.

Halfway through, the lieutenant interrupted him and looked up at me. I

was still standing on the bank by the side of the road.

“It’s perfectly true,” I said.

“Well,” said the lieutenant, “I suppose it’s my business to see it too.

Look here”—to the artilleryman—“we’re detailed here clearing people out

of their houses. You’d better go along and report yourself to

Brigadier-General Marvin, and tell him all you know. He’s at Weybridge.

Know the way?”

“I do,” I said; and he turned his horse southward again.

“Half a mile, you say?” said he.

“At most,” I answered, and pointed over the treetops southward. He

thanked me and rode on, and we saw them no more.

Farther along we came upon a group of three women and two children in

the road, busy clearing out a labourer’s cottage. They had got hold of

a little hand truck, and were piling it up with unclean-looking bundles

and shabby furniture. They were all too assiduously engaged to talk to

us as we passed.

By Byfleet station we emerged from the pine trees, and found the

country calm and peaceful under the morning sunlight. We were far

beyond the range of the Heat-Ray there, and had it not been for the

silent desertion of some of the houses, the stirring movement of

packing in others, and the knot of soldiers standing on the bridge over

the railway and staring down the line towards Woking, the day would

have seemed very like any other Sunday.

Several farm waggons and carts were moving creakily along the road to

Addlestone, and suddenly through the gate of a field we saw, across a

stretch of flat meadow, six twelve-pounders standing neatly at equal

distances pointing towards Woking. The gunners stood by the guns

waiting, and the ammunition waggons were at a business-like distance.

The men stood almost as if under inspection.

“That’s good!” said I. “They will get one fair shot, at any rate.”

The artilleryman hesitated at the gate.

“I shall go on,” he said.

Farther on towards Weybridge, just over the bridge, there were a number

of men in white fatigue jackets throwing up a long rampart, and more

guns behind.

“It’s bows and arrows against the lightning, anyhow,” said the

artilleryman. “They ’aven’t seen that fire-beam yet.”

The officers who were not actively engaged stood and stared over the

treetops southwestward, and the men digging would stop every now and

again to stare in the same direction.

Byfleet was in a tumult; people packing, and a score of hussars, some

of them dismounted, some on horseback, were hunting them about. Three

or four black government waggons, with crosses in white circles, and an

old omnibus, among other vehicles, were being loaded in the village

street. There were scores of people, most of them sufficiently

sabbatical to have assumed their best clothes. The soldiers were having

the greatest difficulty in making them realise the gravity of their

position. We saw one shrivelled old fellow with a huge box and a score

or more of flower pots containing orchids, angrily expostulating with

the corporal who would leave them behind. I stopped and gripped his

arm.

“Do you know what’s over there?” I said, pointing at the pine tops that

hid the Martians.

“Eh?” said he, turning. “I was explainin’ these is vallyble.”

“Death!” I shouted. “Death is coming! Death!” and leaving him to digest

that if he could, I hurried on after the artillery-man. At the corner I

looked back. The soldier had left him, and he was still standing by his

box, with the pots of orchids on the lid of it, and staring vaguely

over the trees.

No one in Weybridge could tell us where the headquarters were

established; the whole place was in such confusion as I had never seen

in any town before. Carts, carriages everywhere, the most astonishing

miscellany of conveyances and horseflesh. The respectable inhabitants

of the place, men in golf and boating costumes, wives prettily dressed,

were packing, river-side loafers energetically helping, children

excited, and, for the most part, highly delighted at this astonishing

variation of their Sunday experiences. In the midst of it all the

worthy vicar was very pluckily holding an early celebration, and his

bell was jangling out above the excitement.

I and the artilleryman, seated on the step of the drinking fountain,

made a very passable meal upon what we had brought with us. Patrols of

soldiers—here no longer hussars, but grenadiers in white—were warning

people to move now or to take refuge in their cellars as soon as the

firing began. We saw as we crossed the railway bridge that a growing

crowd of people had assembled in and about the railway station, and the

swarming platform was piled with boxes and packages. The ordinary

traffic had been stopped, I believe, in order to allow of the passage

of troops and guns to Chertsey, and I have heard since that a savage

struggle occurred for places in the special trains that were put on at

a later hour.

We remained at Weybridge until midday, and at that hour we found

ourselves at the place near Shepperton Lock where the Wey and Thames

join. Part of the time we spent helping two old women to pack a little

cart. The Wey has a treble mouth, and at this point boats are to be

hired, and there was a ferry across the river. On the Shepperton side

was an inn with a lawn, and beyond that the tower of Shepperton

Church—it has been replaced by a spire—rose above the trees.

Here we found an excited and noisy crowd of fugitives. As yet the

flight had not grown to a panic, but there were already far more people

than all the boats going to and fro could enable to cross. People came

panting along under heavy burdens; one husband and wife were even

carrying a small outhouse door between them, with some of their

household goods piled thereon. One man told us he meant to try to get

away from Shepperton station.

There was a lot of shouting, and one man was even jesting. The idea

people seemed to have here was that the Martians were simply formidable

human beings, who might attack and sack the town, to be certainly

destroyed in the end. Every now and then people would glance nervously

across the Wey, at the meadows towards Chertsey, but everything over

there was still.

Across the Thames, except just where the boats landed, everything was

quiet, in vivid contrast with the Surrey side. The people who landed

there from the boats went tramping off down the lane. The big ferryboat

had just made a journey. Three or four soldiers stood on the lawn of

the inn, staring and jesting at the fugitives, without offering to

help. The inn was closed, as it was now within prohibited hours.

“What’s that?” cried a boatman, and “Shut up, you fool!” said a man

near me to a yelping dog. Then the sound came again, this time from the

direction of Chertsey, a muffled thud—the sound of a gun.

The fighting was beginning. Almost immediately unseen batteries across

the river to our right, unseen because of the trees, took up the

chorus, firing heavily one after the other. A woman screamed. Everyone

stood arrested by the sudden stir of battle, near us and yet invisible

to us. Nothing was to be seen save flat meadows, cows feeding

unconcernedly for the most part, and silvery pollard willows motionless

in the warm sunlight.

“The sojers’ll stop ’em,” said a woman beside me, doubtfully. A

haziness rose over the treetops.

Then suddenly we saw a rush of smoke far away up the river, a puff of

smoke that jerked up into the air and hung; and forthwith the ground

heaved under foot and a heavy explosion shook the air, smashing two or

three windows in the houses near, and leaving us astonished.

“Here they are!” shouted a man in a blue jersey. “Yonder! D’yer see

them? Yonder!”

Quickly, one after the other, one, two, three, four of the armoured

Martians appeared, far away over the little trees, across the flat

meadows that stretched towards Chertsey, and striding hurriedly towards

the river. Little cowled figures they seemed at first, going with a

rolling motion and as fast as flying birds.

Then, advancing obliquely towards us, came a fifth. Their armoured

bodies glittered in the sun as they swept swiftly forward upon the

guns, growing rapidly larger as they drew nearer. One on the extreme

left, the remotest that is, flourished a huge case high in the air, and

the ghostly, terrible Heat-Ray I had already seen on Friday night smote

towards Chertsey, and struck the town.

At sight of these strange, swift, and terrible creatures the crowd near

the water’s edge seemed to me to be for a moment horror-struck. There

was no screaming or shouting, but a silence. Then a hoarse murmur and a

movement of feet—a splashing from the water. A man, too frightened to

drop the portmanteau he carried on his shoulder, swung round and sent

me staggering with a blow from the corner of his burden. A woman thrust

at me with her hand and rushed past me. I turned with the rush of the

people, but I was not too terrified for thought. The terrible Heat-Ray

was in my mind. To get under water! That was it!

“Get under water!” I shouted, unheeded.

I faced about again, and rushed towards the approaching Martian, rushed

right down the gravelly beach and headlong into the water. Others did

the same. A boatload of people putting back came leaping out as I

rushed past. The stones under my feet were muddy and slippery, and the

river was so low that I ran perhaps twenty feet scarcely waist-deep.

Then, as the Martian towered overhead scarcely a couple of hundred

yards away, I flung myself forward under the surface. The splashes of

the people in the boats leaping into the river sounded like

thunderclaps in my ears. People were landing hastily on both sides of

the river. But the Martian machine took no more notice for the moment

of the people running this way and that than a man would of the

confusion of ants in a nest against which his foot has kicked. When,

half suffocated, I raised my head above water, the Martian’s hood

pointed at the batteries that were still firing across the river, and

as it advanced it swung loose what must have been the generator of the

Heat-Ray.

In another moment it was on the bank, and in a stride wading halfway

across. The knees of its foremost legs bent at the farther bank, and in

another moment it had raised itself to its full height again, close to

the village of Shepperton. Forthwith the six guns which, unknown to

anyone on the right bank, had been hidden behind the outskirts of that

village, fired simultaneously. The sudden near concussion, the last

close upon the first, made my heart jump. The monster was already

raising the case generating the Heat-Ray as the first shell burst six

yards above the hood.

I gave a cry of astonishment. I saw and thought nothing of the other

four Martian monsters; my attention was riveted upon the nearer

incident. Simultaneously two other shells burst in the air near the

body as the hood twisted round in time to receive, but not in time to

dodge, the fourth shell.

The shell burst clean in the face of the Thing. The hood bulged,

flashed, was whirled off in a dozen tattered fragments of red flesh and

glittering metal.

“Hit!” shouted I, with something between a scream and a cheer.

I heard answering shouts from the people in the water about me. I could

have leaped out of the water with that momentary exultation.

The decapitated colossus reeled like a drunken giant; but it did not

fall over. It recovered its balance by a miracle, and, no longer

heeding its steps and with the camera that fired the Heat-Ray now

rigidly upheld, it reeled swiftly upon Shepperton. The living

intelligence, the Martian within the hood, was slain and splashed to

the four winds of heaven, and the Thing was now but a mere intricate

device of metal whirling to destruction. It drove along in a straight

line, incapable of guidance. It struck the tower of Shepperton Church,

smashing it down as the impact of a battering ram might have done,

swerved aside, blundered on and collapsed with tremendous force into

the river out of my sight.

A violent explosion shook the air, and a spout of water, steam, mud,

and shattered metal shot far up into the sky. As the camera of the

Heat-Ray hit the water, the latter had immediately flashed into steam.

In another moment a huge wave, like a muddy tidal bore but almost

scaldingly hot, came sweeping round the bend upstream. I saw people

struggling shorewards, and heard their screaming and shouting faintly

above the seething and roar of the Martian’s collapse.

For a moment I heeded nothing of the heat, forgot the patent need of

self-preservation. I splashed through the tumultuous water, pushing

aside a man in black to do so, until I could see round the bend. Half a

dozen deserted boats pitched aimlessly upon the confusion of the waves.

The fallen Martian came into sight downstream, lying across the river,

and for the most part submerged.

Thick clouds of steam were pouring off the wreckage, and through the

tumultuously whirling wisps I could see, intermittently and vaguely,

the gigantic limbs churning the water and flinging a splash and spray

of mud and froth into the air. The tentacles swayed and struck like

living arms, and, save for the helpless purposelessness of these

movements, it was as if some wounded thing were struggling for its life

amid the waves. Enormous quantities of a ruddy-brown fluid were

spurting up in noisy jets out of the machine.

My attention was diverted from this death flurry by a furious yelling,

like that of the thing called a siren in our manufacturing towns. A

man, knee-deep near the towing path, shouted inaudibly to me and

pointed. Looking back, I saw the other Martians advancing with gigantic

strides down the riverbank from the direction of Chertsey. The

Shepperton guns spoke this time unavailingly.

At that I ducked at once under water, and, holding my breath until

movement was an agony, blundered painfully ahead under the surface as

long as I could. The water was in a tumult about me, and rapidly

growing hotter.

When for a moment I raised my head to take breath and throw the hair

and water from my eyes, the steam was rising in a whirling white fog

that at first hid the Martians altogether. The noise was deafening.

Then I saw them dimly, colossal figures of grey, magnified by the mist.

They had passed by me, and two were stooping over the frothing,

tumultuous ruins of their comrade.

The third and fourth stood beside him in the water, one perhaps two

hundred yards from me, the other towards Laleham. The generators of the

Heat-Rays waved high, and the hissing beams smote down this way and

that.

The air was full of sound, a deafening and confusing conflict of

noises—the clangorous din of the Martians, the crash of falling houses,

the thud of trees, fences, sheds flashing into flame, and the crackling

and roaring of fire. Dense black smoke was leaping up to mingle with

the steam from the river, and as the Heat-Ray went to and fro over

Weybridge its impact was marked by flashes of incandescent white, that

gave place at once to a smoky dance of lurid flames. The nearer houses

still stood intact, awaiting their fate, shadowy, faint and pallid in

the steam, with the fire behind them going to and fro.

For a moment perhaps I stood there, breast-high in the almost boiling

water, dumbfounded at my position, hopeless of escape. Through the reek

I could see the people who had been with me in the river scrambling out

of the water through the reeds, like little frogs hurrying through

grass from the advance of a man, or running to and fro in utter dismay

on the towing path.

Then suddenly the white flashes of the Heat-Ray came leaping towards

me. The houses caved in as they dissolved at its touch, and darted out

flames; the trees changed to fire with a roar. The Ray flickered up and

down the towing path, licking off the people who ran this way and that,

and came down to the water’s edge not fifty yards from where I stood.

It swept across the river to Shepperton, and the water in its track

rose in a boiling weal crested with steam. I turned shoreward.

In another moment the huge wave, well-nigh at the boiling-point had

rushed upon me. I screamed aloud, and scalded, half blinded, agonised,

I staggered through the leaping, hissing water towards the shore. Had

my foot stumbled, it would have been the end. I fell helplessly, in

full sight of the Martians, upon the broad, bare gravelly spit that

runs down to mark the angle of the Wey and Thames. I expected nothing

but death.

I have a dim memory of the foot of a Martian coming down within a score

of yards of my head, driving straight into the loose gravel, whirling

it this way and that and lifting again; of a long suspense, and then of

the four carrying the debris of their comrade between them, now clear

and then presently faint through a veil of smoke, receding

interminably, as it seemed to me, across a vast space of river and

meadow. And then, very slowly, I realised that by a miracle I had

escaped.

XIII.

HOW I FELL IN WITH THE CURATE.

After getting this sudden lesson in the power of terrestrial weapons,

the Martians retreated to their original position upon Horsell Common;

and in their haste, and encumbered with the debris of their smashed

companion, they no doubt overlooked many such a stray and negligible

victim as myself. Had they left their comrade and pushed on forthwith,

there was nothing at that time between them and London but batteries of

twelve-pounder guns, and they would certainly have reached the capital

in advance of the tidings of their approach; as sudden, dreadful, and

destructive their advent would have been as the earthquake that

destroyed Lisbon a century ago.

But they were in no hurry. Cylinder followed cylinder on its

interplanetary flight; every twenty-four hours brought them

reinforcement. And meanwhile the military and naval authorities, now

fully alive to the tremendous power of their antagonists, worked with

furious energy. Every minute a fresh gun came into position until,

before twilight, every copse, every row of suburban villas on the hilly

slopes about Kingston and Richmond, masked an expectant black muzzle.

And through the charred and desolated area—perhaps twenty square miles

altogether—that encircled the Martian encampment on Horsell Common,

through charred and ruined villages among the green trees, through the

blackened and smoking arcades that had been but a day ago pine

spinneys, crawled the devoted scouts with the heliographs that were

presently to warn the gunners of the Martian approach. But the Martians

now understood our command of artillery and the danger of human

proximity, and not a man ventured within a mile of either cylinder,

save at the price of his life.

It would seem that these giants spent the earlier part of the afternoon

in going to and fro, transferring everything from the second and third

cylinders—the second in Addlestone Golf Links and the third at

Pyrford—to their original pit on Horsell Common. Over that, above the

blackened heather and ruined buildings that stretched far and wide,

stood one as sentinel, while the rest abandoned their vast

fighting-machines and descended into the pit. They were hard at work

there far into the night, and the towering pillar of dense green smoke

that rose therefrom could be seen from the hills about Merrow, and

even, it is said, from Banstead and Epsom Downs.

And while the Martians behind me were thus preparing for their next

sally, and in front of me Humanity gathered for the battle, I made my

way with infinite pains and labour from the fire and smoke of burning

Weybridge towards London.

I saw an abandoned boat, very small and remote, drifting down-stream;

and throwing off the most of my sodden clothes, I went after it, gained

it, and so escaped out of that destruction. There were no oars in the

boat, but I contrived to paddle, as well as my parboiled hands would

allow, down the river towards Halliford and Walton, going very

tediously and continually looking behind me, as you may well

understand. I followed the river, because I considered that the water

gave me my best chance of escape should these giants return.

The hot water from the Martian’s overthrow drifted downstream with me,

so that for the best part of a mile I could see little of either bank.

Once, however, I made out a string of black figures hurrying across the

meadows from the direction of Weybridge. Halliford, it seemed, was

deserted, and several of the houses facing the river were on fire. It

was strange to see the place quite tranquil, quite desolate under the

hot blue sky, with the smoke and little threads of flame going straight

up into the heat of the afternoon. Never before had I seen houses

burning without the accompaniment of an obstructive crowd. A little

farther on the dry reeds up the bank were smoking and glowing, and a

line of fire inland was marching steadily across a late field of hay.

For a long time I drifted, so painful and weary was I after the

violence I had been through, and so intense the heat upon the water.

Then my fears got the better of me again, and I resumed my paddling.

The sun scorched my bare back. At last, as the bridge at Walton was

coming into sight round the bend, my fever and faintness overcame my

fears, and I landed on the Middlesex bank and lay down, deadly sick,

amid the long grass. I suppose the time was then about four or five

o’clock. I got up presently, walked perhaps half a mile without meeting

a soul, and then lay down again in the shadow of a hedge. I seem to

remember talking, wanderingly, to myself during that last spurt. I was

also very thirsty, and bitterly regretful I had drunk no more water. It

is a curious thing that I felt angry with my wife; I cannot account for

it, but my impotent desire to reach Leatherhead worried me excessively.

I do not clearly remember the arrival of the curate, so that probably I

dozed. I became aware of him as a seated figure in soot-smudged shirt

sleeves, and with his upturned, clean-shaven face staring at a faint

flickering that danced over the sky. The sky was what is called a

mackerel sky—rows and rows of faint down-plumes of cloud, just tinted

with the midsummer sunset.

I sat up, and at the rustle of my motion he looked at me quickly.

“Have you any water?” I asked abruptly.

He shook his head.

“You have been asking for water for the last hour,” he said.

For a moment we were silent, taking stock of each other. I dare say he

found me a strange enough figure, naked, save for my water-soaked

trousers and socks, scalded, and my face and shoulders blackened by the

smoke. His face was a fair weakness, his chin retreated, and his hair

lay in crisp, almost flaxen curls on his low forehead; his eyes were

rather large, pale blue, and blankly staring. He spoke abruptly,

looking vacantly away from me.

“What does it mean?” he said. “What do these things mean?”

I stared at him and made no answer.

He extended a thin white hand and spoke in almost a complaining tone.

“Why are these things permitted? What sins have we done? The morning

service was over, I was walking through the roads to clear my brain for

the afternoon, and then—fire, earthquake, death! As if it were Sodom

and Gomorrah! All our work undone, all the work—— What are these

Martians?”

“What are we?” I answered, clearing my throat.

He gripped his knees and turned to look at me again. For half a minute,

perhaps, he stared silently.

“I was walking through the roads to clear my brain,” he said. “And

suddenly—fire, earthquake, death!”

He relapsed into silence, with his chin now sunken almost to his knees.

Presently he began waving his hand.

“All the work—all the Sunday schools—What have we done—what has

Weybridge done? Everything gone—everything destroyed. The church! We

rebuilt it only three years ago. Gone! Swept out of existence! Why?”

Another pause, and he broke out again like one demented.

“The smoke of her burning goeth up for ever and ever!” he shouted.

His eyes flamed, and he pointed a lean finger in the direction of

Weybridge.

By this time I was beginning to take his measure. The tremendous

tragedy in which he had been involved—it was evident he was a fugitive

from Weybridge—had driven him to the very verge of his reason.

“Are we far from Sunbury?” I said, in a matter-of-fact tone.

“What are we to do?” he asked. “Are these creatures everywhere? Has the

earth been given over to them?”

“Are we far from Sunbury?”

“Only this morning I officiated at early celebration——”

“Things have changed,” I said, quietly. “You must keep your head. There

is still hope.”

“Hope!”

“Yes. Plentiful hope—for all this destruction!”

I began to explain my view of our position. He listened at first, but

as I went on the interest dawning in his eyes gave place to their

former stare, and his regard wandered from me.

“This must be the beginning of the end,” he said, interrupting me. “The

end! The great and terrible day of the Lord! When men shall call upon

the mountains and the rocks to fall upon them and hide them—hide them

from the face of Him that sitteth upon the throne!”

I began to understand the position. I ceased my laboured reasoning,

struggled to my feet, and, standing over him, laid my hand on his

shoulder.

“Be a man!” said I. “You are scared out of your wits! What good is

religion if it collapses under calamity? Think of what earthquakes and

floods, wars and volcanoes, have done before to men! Did you think God

had exempted Weybridge? He is not an insurance agent.”

For a time he sat in blank silence.

“But how can we escape?” he asked, suddenly. “They are invulnerable,

they are pitiless.”

“Neither the one nor, perhaps, the other,” I answered. “And the

mightier they are the more sane and wary should we be. One of them was

killed yonder not three hours ago.”

“Killed!” he said, staring about him. “How can God’s ministers be

killed?”

“I saw it happen.” I proceeded to tell him. “We have chanced to come in

for the thick of it,” said I, “and that is all.”

“What is that flicker in the sky?” he asked abruptly.

I told him it was the heliograph signalling—that it was the sign of

human help and effort in the sky.

“We are in the midst of it,” I said, “quiet as it is. That flicker in

the sky tells of the gathering storm. Yonder, I take it are the

Martians, and Londonward, where those hills rise about Richmond and

Kingston and the trees give cover, earthworks are being thrown up and

guns are being placed. Presently the Martians will be coming this way

again.”

And even as I spoke he sprang to his feet and stopped me by a gesture.

“Listen!” he said.

From beyond the low hills across the water came the dull resonance of

distant guns and a remote weird crying. Then everything was still. A

cockchafer came droning over the hedge and past us. High in the west

the crescent moon hung faint and pale above the smoke of Weybridge and

Shepperton and the hot, still splendour of the sunset.

“We had better follow this path,” I said, “northward.”

XIV.

IN LONDON.

My younger brother was in London when the Martians fell at Woking. He

was a medical student working for an imminent examination, and he heard

nothing of the arrival until Saturday morning. The morning papers on

Saturday contained, in addition to lengthy special articles on the

planet Mars, on life in the planets, and so forth, a brief and vaguely

worded telegram, all the more striking for its brevity.

The Martians, alarmed by the approach of a crowd, had killed a number

of people with a quick-firing gun, so the story ran. The telegram

concluded with the words: “Formidable as they seem to be, the Martians

have not moved from the pit into which they have fallen, and, indeed,

seem incapable of doing so. Probably this is due to the relative

strength of the earth’s gravitational energy.” On that last text their

leader-writer expanded very comfortingly.

Of course all the students in the crammer’s biology class, to which my

brother went that day, were intensely interested, but there were no

signs of any unusual excitement in the streets. The afternoon papers

puffed scraps of news under big headlines. They had nothing to tell

beyond the movements of troops about the common, and the burning of the

pine woods between Woking and Weybridge, until eight. Then the \_St.

James’s Gazette\_, in an extra-special edition, announced the bare fact

of the interruption of telegraphic communication. This was thought to

be due to the falling of burning pine trees across the line. Nothing

more of the fighting was known that night, the night of my drive to

Leatherhead and back.

My brother felt no anxiety about us, as he knew from the description in

the papers that the cylinder was a good two miles from my house. He

made up his mind to run down that night to me, in order, as he says, to

see the Things before they were killed. He dispatched a telegram, which

never reached me, about four o’clock, and spent the evening at a music

hall.

In London, also, on Saturday night there was a thunderstorm, and my

brother reached Waterloo in a cab. On the platform from which the

midnight train usually starts he learned, after some waiting, that an

accident prevented trains from reaching Woking that night. The nature

of the accident he could not ascertain; indeed, the railway authorities

did not clearly know at that time. There was very little excitement in

the station, as the officials, failing to realise that anything further

than a breakdown between Byfleet and Woking junction had occurred, were

running the theatre trains which usually passed through Woking round by

Virginia Water or Guildford. They were busy making the necessary

arrangements to alter the route of the Southampton and Portsmouth

Sunday League excursions. A nocturnal newspaper reporter, mistaking my

brother for the traffic manager, to whom he bears a slight resemblance,

waylaid and tried to interview him. Few people, excepting the railway

officials, connected the breakdown with the Martians.

I have read, in another account of these events, that on Sunday morning

“all London was electrified by the news from Woking.” As a matter of

fact, there was nothing to justify that very extravagant phrase. Plenty

of Londoners did not hear of the Martians until the panic of Monday

morning. Those who did took some time to realise all that the hastily

worded telegrams in the Sunday papers conveyed. The majority of people

in London do not read Sunday papers.

The habit of personal security, moreover, is so deeply fixed in the

Londoner’s mind, and startling intelligence so much a matter of course

in the papers, that they could read without any personal tremors:

“About seven o’clock last night the Martians came out of the cylinder,

and, moving about under an armour of metallic shields, have completely

wrecked Woking station with the adjacent houses, and massacred an

entire battalion of the Cardigan Regiment. No details are known. Maxims

have been absolutely useless against their armour; the field guns have

been disabled by them. Flying hussars have been galloping into

Chertsey. The Martians appear to be moving slowly towards Chertsey or

Windsor. Great anxiety prevails in West Surrey, and earthworks are

being thrown up to check the advance Londonward.” That was how the

\_Sunday Sun\_ put it, and a clever and remarkably prompt “handbook”

article in the \_Referee\_ compared the affair to a menagerie suddenly

let loose in a village.

No one in London knew positively of the nature of the armoured

Martians, and there was still a fixed idea that these monsters must be

sluggish: “crawling,” “creeping painfully”—such expressions occurred in

almost all the earlier reports. None of the telegrams could have been

written by an eyewitness of their advance. The Sunday papers printed

separate editions as further news came to hand, some even in default of

it. But there was practically nothing more to tell people until late in

the afternoon, when the authorities gave the press agencies the news in

their possession. It was stated that the people of Walton and

Weybridge, and all the district were pouring along the roads

Londonward, and that was all.

My brother went to church at the Foundling Hospital in the morning,

still in ignorance of what had happened on the previous night. There he

heard allusions made to the invasion, and a special prayer for peace.

Coming out, he bought a \_Referee\_. He became alarmed at the news in

this, and went again to Waterloo station to find out if communication

were restored. The omnibuses, carriages, cyclists, and innumerable

people walking in their best clothes seemed scarcely affected by the

strange intelligence that the newsvendors were disseminating. People

were interested, or, if alarmed, alarmed only on account of the local

residents. At the station he heard for the first time that the Windsor

and Chertsey lines were now interrupted. The porters told him that

several remarkable telegrams had been received in the morning from

Byfleet and Chertsey stations, but that these had abruptly ceased. My

brother could get very little precise detail out of them.

“There’s fighting going on about Weybridge” was the extent of their

information.

The train service was now very much disorganised. Quite a number of

people who had been expecting friends from places on the South-Western

network were standing about the station. One grey-headed old gentleman

came and abused the South-Western Company bitterly to my brother. “It

wants showing up,” he said.

One or two trains came in from Richmond, Putney, and Kingston,

containing people who had gone out for a day’s boating and found the

locks closed and a feeling of panic in the air. A man in a blue and

white blazer addressed my brother, full of strange tidings.

“There’s hosts of people driving into Kingston in traps and carts and

things, with boxes of valuables and all that,” he said. “They come from

Molesey and Weybridge and Walton, and they say there’s been guns heard

at Chertsey, heavy firing, and that mounted soldiers have told them to

get off at once because the Martians are coming. We heard guns firing

at Hampton Court station, but we thought it was thunder. What the

dickens does it all mean? The Martians can’t get out of their pit, can

they?”

My brother could not tell him.

Afterwards he found that the vague feeling of alarm had spread to the

clients of the underground railway, and that the Sunday excursionists

began to return from all over the South-Western “lung”—Barnes,

Wimbledon, Richmond Park, Kew, and so forth—at unnaturally early hours;

but not a soul had anything more than vague hearsay to tell of.

Everyone connected with the terminus seemed ill-tempered.

About five o’clock the gathering crowd in the station was immensely

excited by the opening of the line of communication, which is almost

invariably closed, between the South-Eastern and the South-Western

stations, and the passage of carriage trucks bearing huge guns and

carriages crammed with soldiers. These were the guns that were brought

up from Woolwich and Chatham to cover Kingston. There was an exchange

of pleasantries: “You’ll get eaten!” “We’re the beast-tamers!” and so

forth. A little while after that a squad of police came into the

station and began to clear the public off the platforms, and my brother

went out into the street again.

The church bells were ringing for evensong, and a squad of Salvation

Army lassies came singing down Waterloo Road. On the bridge a number of

loafers were watching a curious brown scum that came drifting down the

stream in patches. The sun was just setting, and the Clock Tower and

the Houses of Parliament rose against one of the most peaceful skies it

is possible to imagine, a sky of gold, barred with long transverse

stripes of reddish-purple cloud. There was talk of a floating body. One

of the men there, a reservist he said he was, told my brother he had

seen the heliograph flickering in the west.

In Wellington Street my brother met a couple of sturdy roughs who had

just been rushed out of Fleet Street with still-wet newspapers and

staring placards. “Dreadful catastrophe!” they bawled one to the other

down Wellington Street. “Fighting at Weybridge! Full description!

Repulse of the Martians! London in Danger!” He had to give threepence

for a copy of that paper.

Then it was, and then only, that he realised something of the full

power and terror of these monsters. He learned that they were not

merely a handful of small sluggish creatures, but that they were minds

swaying vast mechanical bodies; and that they could move swiftly and

smite with such power that even the mightiest guns could not stand

against them.

They were described as “vast spiderlike machines, nearly a hundred feet

high, capable of the speed of an express train, and able to shoot out a

beam of intense heat.” Masked batteries, chiefly of field guns, had

been planted in the country about Horsell Common, and especially

between the Woking district and London. Five of the machines had been

seen moving towards the Thames, and one, by a happy chance, had been

destroyed. In the other cases the shells had missed, and the batteries

had been at once annihilated by the Heat-Rays. Heavy losses of soldiers

were mentioned, but the tone of the dispatch was optimistic.

The Martians had been repulsed; they were not invulnerable. They had

retreated to their triangle of cylinders again, in the circle about

Woking. Signallers with heliographs were pushing forward upon them from

all sides. Guns were in rapid transit from Windsor, Portsmouth,

Aldershot, Woolwich—even from the north; among others, long wire-guns

of ninety-five tons from Woolwich. Altogether one hundred and sixteen

were in position or being hastily placed, chiefly covering London.

Never before in England had there been such a vast or rapid

concentration of military material.

Any further cylinders that fell, it was hoped, could be destroyed at

once by high explosives, which were being rapidly manufactured and

distributed. No doubt, ran the report, the situation was of the

strangest and gravest description, but the public was exhorted to avoid

and discourage panic. No doubt the Martians were strange and terrible

in the extreme, but at the outside there could not be more than twenty

of them against our millions.

The authorities had reason to suppose, from the size of the cylinders,

that at the outside there could not be more than five in each

cylinder—fifteen altogether. And one at least was disposed of—perhaps

more. The public would be fairly warned of the approach of danger, and

elaborate measures were being taken for the protection of the people in

the threatened southwestern suburbs. And so, with reiterated assurances

of the safety of London and the ability of the authorities to cope with

the difficulty, this quasi-proclamation closed.

This was printed in enormous type on paper so fresh that it was still

wet, and there had been no time to add a word of comment. It was

curious, my brother said, to see how ruthlessly the usual contents of

the paper had been hacked and taken out to give this place.

All down Wellington Street people could be seen fluttering out the pink

sheets and reading, and the Strand was suddenly noisy with the voices

of an army of hawkers following these pioneers. Men came scrambling off

buses to secure copies. Certainly this news excited people intensely,

whatever their previous apathy. The shutters of a map shop in the

Strand were being taken down, my brother said, and a man in his Sunday

raiment, lemon-yellow gloves even, was visible inside the window

hastily fastening maps of Surrey to the glass.

Going on along the Strand to Trafalgar Square, the paper in his hand,

my brother saw some of the fugitives from West Surrey. There was a man

with his wife and two boys and some articles of furniture in a cart

such as greengrocers use. He was driving from the direction of

Westminster Bridge; and close behind him came a hay waggon with five or

six respectable-looking people in it, and some boxes and bundles. The

faces of these people were haggard, and their entire appearance

contrasted conspicuously with the Sabbath-best appearance of the people

on the omnibuses. People in fashionable clothing peeped at them out of

cabs. They stopped at the Square as if undecided which way to take, and

finally turned eastward along the Strand. Some way behind these came a

man in workday clothes, riding one of those old-fashioned tricycles

with a small front wheel. He was dirty and white in the face.

My brother turned down towards Victoria, and met a number of such

people. He had a vague idea that he might see something of me. He

noticed an unusual number of police regulating the traffic. Some of the

refugees were exchanging news with the people on the omnibuses. One was

professing to have seen the Martians. “Boilers on stilts, I tell you,

striding along like men.” Most of them were excited and animated by

their strange experience.

Beyond Victoria the public-houses were doing a lively trade with these

arrivals. At all the street corners groups of people were reading

papers, talking excitedly, or staring at these unusual Sunday visitors.

They seemed to increase as night drew on, until at last the roads, my

brother said, were like Epsom High Street on a Derby Day. My brother

addressed several of these fugitives and got unsatisfactory answers

from most.

None of them could tell him any news of Woking except one man, who

assured him that Woking had been entirely destroyed on the previous

night.

“I come from Byfleet,” he said; “a man on a bicycle came through the

place in the early morning, and ran from door to door warning us to

come away. Then came soldiers. We went out to look, and there were

clouds of smoke to the south—nothing but smoke, and not a soul coming

that way. Then we heard the guns at Chertsey, and folks coming from

Weybridge. So I’ve locked up my house and come on.”

At that time there was a strong feeling in the streets that the

authorities were to blame for their incapacity to dispose of the

invaders without all this inconvenience.

About eight o’clock a noise of heavy firing was distinctly audible all

over the south of London. My brother could not hear it for the traffic

in the main thoroughfares, but by striking through the quiet back

streets to the river he was able to distinguish it quite plainly.

He walked from Westminster to his apartments near Regent’s Park, about

two. He was now very anxious on my account, and disturbed at the

evident magnitude of the trouble. His mind was inclined to run, even as

mine had run on Saturday, on military details. He thought of all those

silent, expectant guns, of the suddenly nomadic countryside; he tried

to imagine “boilers on stilts” a hundred feet high.

There were one or two cartloads of refugees passing along Oxford

Street, and several in the Marylebone Road, but so slowly was the news

spreading that Regent Street and Portland Place were full of their

usual Sunday-night promenaders, albeit they talked in groups, and along

the edge of Regent’s Park there were as many silent couples “walking

out” together under the scattered gas lamps as ever there had been. The

night was warm and still, and a little oppressive; the sound of guns

continued intermittently, and after midnight there seemed to be sheet

lightning in the south.

He read and re-read the paper, fearing the worst had happened to me. He

was restless, and after supper prowled out again aimlessly. He returned

and tried in vain to divert his attention to his examination notes. He

went to bed a little after midnight, and was awakened from lurid dreams

in the small hours of Monday by the sound of door knockers, feet

running in the street, distant drumming, and a clamour of bells. Red

reflections danced on the ceiling. For a moment he lay astonished,

wondering whether day had come or the world gone mad. Then he jumped

out of bed and ran to the window.

His room was an attic and as he thrust his head out, up and down the

street there were a dozen echoes to the noise of his window sash, and

heads in every kind of night disarray appeared. Enquiries were being

shouted. “They are coming!” bawled a policeman, hammering at the door;

“the Martians are coming!” and hurried to the next door.

The sound of drumming and trumpeting came from the Albany Street

Barracks, and every church within earshot was hard at work killing

sleep with a vehement disorderly tocsin. There was a noise of doors

opening, and window after window in the houses opposite flashed from

darkness into yellow illumination.

Up the street came galloping a closed carriage, bursting abruptly into

noise at the corner, rising to a clattering climax under the window,

and dying away slowly in the distance. Close on the rear of this came a

couple of cabs, the forerunners of a long procession of flying

vehicles, going for the most part to Chalk Farm station, where the

North-Western special trains were loading up, instead of coming down

the gradient into Euston.

For a long time my brother stared out of the window in blank

astonishment, watching the policemen hammering at door after door, and

delivering their incomprehensible message. Then the door behind him

opened, and the man who lodged across the landing came in, dressed only

in shirt, trousers, and slippers, his braces loose about his waist, his

hair disordered from his pillow.

“What the devil is it?” he asked. “A fire? What a devil of a row!”

They both craned their heads out of the window, straining to hear what

the policemen were shouting. People were coming out of the side

streets, and standing in groups at the corners talking.

“What the devil is it all about?” said my brother’s fellow lodger.

My brother answered him vaguely and began to dress, running with each

garment to the window in order to miss nothing of the growing

excitement. And presently men selling unnaturally early newspapers came

bawling into the street:

“London in danger of suffocation! The Kingston and Richmond defences

forced! Fearful massacres in the Thames Valley!”

And all about him—in the rooms below, in the houses on each side and

across the road, and behind in the Park Terraces and in the hundred

other streets of that part of Marylebone, and the Westbourne Park

district and St. Pancras, and westward and northward in Kilburn and St.

John’s Wood and Hampstead, and eastward in Shoreditch and Highbury and

Haggerston and Hoxton, and, indeed, through all the vastness of London

from Ealing to East Ham—people were rubbing their eyes, and opening

windows to stare out and ask aimless questions, dressing hastily as the

first breath of the coming storm of Fear blew through the streets. It

was the dawn of the great panic. London, which had gone to bed on

Sunday night oblivious and inert, was awakened, in the small hours of

Monday morning, to a vivid sense of danger.

Unable from his window to learn what was happening, my brother went

down and out into the street, just as the sky between the parapets of

the houses grew pink with the early dawn. The flying people on foot and

in vehicles grew more numerous every moment. “Black Smoke!” he heard

people crying, and again “Black Smoke!” The contagion of such a

unanimous fear was inevitable. As my brother hesitated on the

door-step, he saw another newsvendor approaching, and got a paper

forthwith. The man was running away with the rest, and selling his

papers for a shilling each as he ran—a grotesque mingling of profit and

panic.

And from this paper my brother read that catastrophic dispatch of the

Commander-in-Chief:

“The Martians are able to discharge enormous clouds of a black and

poisonous vapour by means of rockets. They have smothered our

batteries, destroyed Richmond, Kingston, and Wimbledon, and are

advancing slowly towards London, destroying everything on the way. It

is impossible to stop them. There is no safety from the Black Smoke but

in instant flight.”

That was all, but it was enough. The whole population of the great

six-million city was stirring, slipping, running; presently it would be

pouring \_en masse\_ northward.

“Black Smoke!” the voices cried. “Fire!”

The bells of the neighbouring church made a jangling tumult, a cart

carelessly driven smashed, amid shrieks and curses, against the water

trough up the street. Sickly yellow lights went to and fro in the

houses, and some of the passing cabs flaunted unextinguished lamps. And

overhead the dawn was growing brighter, clear and steady and calm.

He heard footsteps running to and fro in the rooms, and up and down

stairs behind him. His landlady came to the door, loosely wrapped in

dressing gown and shawl; her husband followed, ejaculating.

As my brother began to realise the import of all these things, he

turned hastily to his own room, put all his available money—some ten

pounds altogether—into his pockets, and went out again into the

streets.

XV.

WHAT HAD HAPPENED IN SURREY.

It was while the curate had sat and talked so wildly to me under the

hedge in the flat meadows near Halliford, and while my brother was

watching the fugitives stream over Westminster Bridge, that the

Martians had resumed the offensive. So far as one can ascertain from

the conflicting accounts that have been put forth, the majority of them

remained busied with preparations in the Horsell pit until nine that

night, hurrying on some operation that disengaged huge volumes of green

smoke.

But three certainly came out about eight o’clock and, advancing slowly

and cautiously, made their way through Byfleet and Pyrford towards

Ripley and Weybridge, and so came in sight of the expectant batteries

against the setting sun. These Martians did not advance in a body, but

in a line, each perhaps a mile and a half from his nearest fellow. They

communicated with one another by means of sirenlike howls, running up

and down the scale from one note to another.

It was this howling and firing of the guns at Ripley and St. George’s

Hill that we had heard at Upper Halliford. The Ripley gunners,

unseasoned artillery volunteers who ought never to have been placed in

such a position, fired one wild, premature, ineffectual volley, and

bolted on horse and foot through the deserted village, while the

Martian, without using his Heat-Ray, walked serenely over their guns,

stepped gingerly among them, passed in front of them, and so came

unexpectedly upon the guns in Painshill Park, which he destroyed.

The St. George’s Hill men, however, were better led or of a better

mettle. Hidden by a pine wood as they were, they seem to have been

quite unsuspected by the Martian nearest to them. They laid their guns

as deliberately as if they had been on parade, and fired at about a

thousand yards’ range.

The shells flashed all round him, and he was seen to advance a few

paces, stagger, and go down. Everybody yelled together, and the guns

were reloaded in frantic haste. The overthrown Martian set up a

prolonged ululation, and immediately a second glittering giant,

answering him, appeared over the trees to the south. It would seem that

a leg of the tripod had been smashed by one of the shells. The whole of

the second volley flew wide of the Martian on the ground, and,

simultaneously, both his companions brought their Heat-Rays to bear on

the battery. The ammunition blew up, the pine trees all about the guns

flashed into fire, and only one or two of the men who were already

running over the crest of the hill escaped.

After this it would seem that the three took counsel together and

halted, and the scouts who were watching them report that they remained

absolutely stationary for the next half hour. The Martian who had been

overthrown crawled tediously out of his hood, a small brown figure,

oddly suggestive from that distance of a speck of blight, and

apparently engaged in the repair of his support. About nine he had

finished, for his cowl was then seen above the trees again.

It was a few minutes past nine that night when these three sentinels

were joined by four other Martians, each carrying a thick black tube. A

similar tube was handed to each of the three, and the seven proceeded

to distribute themselves at equal distances along a curved line between

St. George’s Hill, Weybridge, and the village of Send, southwest of

Ripley.

A dozen rockets sprang out of the hills before them so soon as they

began to move, and warned the waiting batteries about Ditton and Esher.

At the same time four of their fighting machines, similarly armed with

tubes, crossed the river, and two of them, black against the western

sky, came into sight of myself and the curate as we hurried wearily and

painfully along the road that runs northward out of Halliford. They

moved, as it seemed to us, upon a cloud, for a milky mist covered the

fields and rose to a third of their height.

At this sight the curate cried faintly in his throat, and began

running; but I knew it was no good running from a Martian, and I turned

aside and crawled through dewy nettles and brambles into the broad

ditch by the side of the road. He looked back, saw what I was doing,

and turned to join me.

The two halted, the nearer to us standing and facing Sunbury, the

remoter being a grey indistinctness towards the evening star, away

towards Staines.

The occasional howling of the Martians had ceased; they took up their

positions in the huge crescent about their cylinders in absolute

silence. It was a crescent with twelve miles between its horns. Never

since the devising of gunpowder was the beginning of a battle so still.

To us and to an observer about Ripley it would have had precisely the

same effect—the Martians seemed in solitary possession of the darkling

night, lit only as it was by the slender moon, the stars, the afterglow

of the daylight, and the ruddy glare from St. George’s Hill and the

woods of Painshill.

But facing that crescent everywhere—at Staines, Hounslow, Ditton,

Esher, Ockham, behind hills and woods south of the river, and across

the flat grass meadows to the north of it, wherever a cluster of trees

or village houses gave sufficient cover—the guns were waiting. The

signal rockets burst and rained their sparks through the night and

vanished, and the spirit of all those watching batteries rose to a

tense expectation. The Martians had but to advance into the line of

fire, and instantly those motionless black forms of men, those guns

glittering so darkly in the early night, would explode into a

thunderous fury of battle.

No doubt the thought that was uppermost in a thousand of those vigilant

minds, even as it was uppermost in mine, was the riddle—how much they

understood of us. Did they grasp that we in our millions were

organized, disciplined, working together? Or did they interpret our

spurts of fire, the sudden stinging of our shells, our steady

investment of their encampment, as we should the furious unanimity of

onslaught in a disturbed hive of bees? Did they dream they might

exterminate us? (At that time no one knew what food they needed.) A

hundred such questions struggled together in my mind as I watched that

vast sentinel shape. And in the back of my mind was the sense of all

the huge unknown and hidden forces Londonward. Had they prepared

pitfalls? Were the powder mills at Hounslow ready as a snare? Would the

Londoners have the heart and courage to make a greater Moscow of their

mighty province of houses?

Then, after an interminable time, as it seemed to us, crouching and

peering through the hedge, came a sound like the distant concussion of

a gun. Another nearer, and then another. And then the Martian beside us

raised his tube on high and discharged it, gunwise, with a heavy report

that made the ground heave. The one towards Staines answered him. There

was no flash, no smoke, simply that loaded detonation.

I was so excited by these heavy minute-guns following one another that

I so far forgot my personal safety and my scalded hands as to clamber

up into the hedge and stare towards Sunbury. As I did so a second

report followed, and a big projectile hurtled overhead towards

Hounslow. I expected at least to see smoke or fire, or some such

evidence of its work. But all I saw was the deep blue sky above, with

one solitary star, and the white mist spreading wide and low beneath.

And there had been no crash, no answering explosion. The silence was

restored; the minute lengthened to three.

“What has happened?” said the curate, standing up beside me.

“Heaven knows!” said I.

A bat flickered by and vanished. A distant tumult of shouting began and

ceased. I looked again at the Martian, and saw he was now moving

eastward along the riverbank, with a swift, rolling motion.

Every moment I expected the fire of some hidden battery to spring upon

him; but the evening calm was unbroken. The figure of the Martian grew

smaller as he receded, and presently the mist and the gathering night

had swallowed him up. By a common impulse we clambered higher. Towards

Sunbury was a dark appearance, as though a conical hill had suddenly

come into being there, hiding our view of the farther country; and

then, remoter across the river, over Walton, we saw another such

summit. These hill-like forms grew lower and broader even as we stared.

Moved by a sudden thought, I looked northward, and there I perceived a

third of these cloudy black kopjes had risen.

Everything had suddenly become very still. Far away to the southeast,

marking the quiet, we heard the Martians hooting to one another, and

then the air quivered again with the distant thud of their guns. But

the earthly artillery made no reply.

Now at the time we could not understand these things, but later I was

to learn the meaning of these ominous kopjes that gathered in the

twilight. Each of the Martians, standing in the great crescent I have

described, had discharged, by means of the gunlike tube he carried, a

huge canister over whatever hill, copse, cluster of houses, or other

possible cover for guns, chanced to be in front of him. Some fired only

one of these, some two—as in the case of the one we had seen; the one

at Ripley is said to have discharged no fewer than five at that time.

These canisters smashed on striking the ground—they did not explode—and

incontinently disengaged an enormous volume of heavy, inky vapour,

coiling and pouring upward in a huge and ebony cumulus cloud, a gaseous

hill that sank and spread itself slowly over the surrounding country.

And the touch of that vapour, the inhaling of its pungent wisps, was

death to all that breathes.

It was heavy, this vapour, heavier than the densest smoke, so that,

after the first tumultuous uprush and outflow of its impact, it sank

down through the air and poured over the ground in a manner rather

liquid than gaseous, abandoning the hills, and streaming into the

valleys and ditches and watercourses even as I have heard the

carbonic-acid gas that pours from volcanic clefts is wont to do. And

where it came upon water some chemical action occurred, and the surface

would be instantly covered with a powdery scum that sank slowly and

made way for more. The scum was absolutely insoluble, and it is a

strange thing, seeing the instant effect of the gas, that one could

drink without hurt the water from which it had been strained. The

vapour did not diffuse as a true gas would do. It hung together in

banks, flowing sluggishly down the slope of the land and driving

reluctantly before the wind, and very slowly it combined with the mist

and moisture of the air, and sank to the earth in the form of dust.

Save that an unknown element giving a group of four lines in the blue

of the spectrum is concerned, we are still entirely ignorant of the

nature of this substance.

Once the tumultuous upheaval of its dispersion was over, the black

smoke clung so closely to the ground, even before its precipitation,

that fifty feet up in the air, on the roofs and upper stories of high

houses and on great trees, there was a chance of escaping its poison

altogether, as was proved even that night at Street Cobham and Ditton.

The man who escaped at the former place tells a wonderful story of the

strangeness of its coiling flow, and how he looked down from the church

spire and saw the houses of the village rising like ghosts out of its

inky nothingness. For a day and a half he remained there, weary,

starving and sun-scorched, the earth under the blue sky and against the

prospect of the distant hills a velvet-black expanse, with red roofs,

green trees, and, later, black-veiled shrubs and gates, barns,

outhouses, and walls, rising here and there into the sunlight.

But that was at Street Cobham, where the black vapour was allowed to

remain until it sank of its own accord into the ground. As a rule the

Martians, when it had served its purpose, cleared the air of it again

by wading into it and directing a jet of steam upon it.

This they did with the vapour banks near us, as we saw in the starlight

from the window of a deserted house at Upper Halliford, whither we had

returned. From there we could see the searchlights on Richmond Hill and

Kingston Hill going to and fro, and about eleven the windows rattled,

and we heard the sound of the huge siege guns that had been put in

position there. These continued intermittently for the space of a

quarter of an hour, sending chance shots at the invisible Martians at

Hampton and Ditton, and then the pale beams of the electric light

vanished, and were replaced by a bright red glow.

Then the fourth cylinder fell—a brilliant green meteor—as I learned

afterwards, in Bushey Park. Before the guns on the Richmond and

Kingston line of hills began, there was a fitful cannonade far away in

the southwest, due, I believe, to guns being fired haphazard before the

black vapour could overwhelm the gunners.

So, setting about it as methodically as men might smoke out a wasps’

nest, the Martians spread this strange stifling vapour over the

Londonward country. The horns of the crescent slowly moved apart, until

at last they formed a line from Hanwell to Coombe and Malden. All night

through their destructive tubes advanced. Never once, after the Martian

at St. George’s Hill was brought down, did they give the artillery the

ghost of a chance against them. Wherever there was a possibility of

guns being laid for them unseen, a fresh canister of the black vapour

was discharged, and where the guns were openly displayed the Heat-Ray

was brought to bear.

By midnight the blazing trees along the slopes of Richmond Park and the

glare of Kingston Hill threw their light upon a network of black smoke,

blotting out the whole valley of the Thames and extending as far as the

eye could reach. And through this two Martians slowly waded, and turned

their hissing steam jets this way and that.

They were sparing of the Heat-Ray that night, either because they had

but a limited supply of material for its production or because they did

not wish to destroy the country but only to crush and overawe the

opposition they had aroused. In the latter aim they certainly

succeeded. Sunday night was the end of the organised opposition to

their movements. After that no body of men would stand against them, so

hopeless was the enterprise. Even the crews of the torpedo-boats and

destroyers that had brought their quick-firers up the Thames refused to

stop, mutinied, and went down again. The only offensive operation men

ventured upon after that night was the preparation of mines and

pitfalls, and even in that their energies were frantic and spasmodic.

One has to imagine, as well as one may, the fate of those batteries

towards Esher, waiting so tensely in the twilight. Survivors there were

none. One may picture the orderly expectation, the officers alert and

watchful, the gunners ready, the ammunition piled to hand, the limber

gunners with their horses and waggons, the groups of civilian

spectators standing as near as they were permitted, the evening

stillness, the ambulances and hospital tents with the burned and

wounded from Weybridge; then the dull resonance of the shots the

Martians fired, and the clumsy projectile whirling over the trees and

houses and smashing amid the neighbouring fields.

One may picture, too, the sudden shifting of the attention, the swiftly

spreading coils and bellyings of that blackness advancing headlong,

towering heavenward, turning the twilight to a palpable darkness, a

strange and horrible antagonist of vapour striding upon its victims,

men and horses near it seen dimly, running, shrieking, falling

headlong, shouts of dismay, the guns suddenly abandoned, men choking

and writhing on the ground, and the swift broadening-out of the opaque

cone of smoke. And then night and extinction—nothing but a silent mass

of impenetrable vapour hiding its dead.

Before dawn the black vapour was pouring through the streets of

Richmond, and the disintegrating organism of government was, with a

last expiring effort, rousing the population of London to the necessity

of flight.

XVI.

THE EXODUS FROM LONDON.

So you understand the roaring wave of fear that swept through the

greatest city in the world just as Monday was dawning—the stream of

flight rising swiftly to a torrent, lashing in a foaming tumult round

the railway stations, banked up into a horrible struggle about the

shipping in the Thames, and hurrying by every available channel

northward and eastward. By ten o’clock the police organisation, and by

midday even the railway organisations, were losing coherency, losing

shape and efficiency, guttering, softening, running at last in that

swift liquefaction of the social body.

All the railway lines north of the Thames and the South-Eastern people

at Cannon Street had been warned by midnight on Sunday, and trains were

being filled. People were fighting savagely for standing-room in the

carriages even at two o’clock. By three, people were being trampled and

crushed even in Bishopsgate Street, a couple of hundred yards or more

from Liverpool Street station; revolvers were fired, people stabbed,

and the policemen who had been sent to direct the traffic, exhausted

and infuriated, were breaking the heads of the people they were called

out to protect.

And as the day advanced and the engine drivers and stokers refused to

return to London, the pressure of the flight drove the people in an

ever-thickening multitude away from the stations and along the

northward-running roads. By midday a Martian had been seen at Barnes,

and a cloud of slowly sinking black vapour drove along the Thames and

across the flats of Lambeth, cutting off all escape over the bridges in

its sluggish advance. Another bank drove over Ealing, and surrounded a

little island of survivors on Castle Hill, alive, but unable to escape.

After a fruitless struggle to get aboard a North-Western train at Chalk

Farm—the engines of the trains that had loaded in the goods yard there

\_ploughed\_ through shrieking people, and a dozen stalwart men fought to

keep the crowd from crushing the driver against his furnace—my brother

emerged upon the Chalk Farm road, dodged across through a hurrying

swarm of vehicles, and had the luck to be foremost in the sack of a

cycle shop. The front tire of the machine he got was punctured in

dragging it through the window, but he got up and off, notwithstanding,

with no further injury than a cut wrist. The steep foot of Haverstock

Hill was impassable owing to several overturned horses, and my brother

struck into Belsize Road.

So he got out of the fury of the panic, and, skirting the Edgware Road,

reached Edgware about seven, fasting and wearied, but well ahead of the

crowd. Along the road people were standing in the roadway, curious,

wondering. He was passed by a number of cyclists, some horsemen, and

two motor cars. A mile from Edgware the rim of the wheel broke, and the

machine became unridable. He left it by the roadside and trudged

through the village. There were shops half opened in the main street of

the place, and people crowded on the pavement and in the doorways and

windows, staring astonished at this extraordinary procession of

fugitives that was beginning. He succeeded in getting some food at an

inn.

For a time he remained in Edgware not knowing what next to do. The

flying people increased in number. Many of them, like my brother,

seemed inclined to loiter in the place. There was no fresh news of the

invaders from Mars.

At that time the road was crowded, but as yet far from congested. Most

of the fugitives at that hour were mounted on cycles, but there were

soon motor cars, hansom cabs, and carriages hurrying along, and the

dust hung in heavy clouds along the road to St. Albans.

It was perhaps a vague idea of making his way to Chelmsford, where some

friends of his lived, that at last induced my brother to strike into a

quiet lane running eastward. Presently he came upon a stile, and,

crossing it, followed a footpath northeastward. He passed near several

farmhouses and some little places whose names he did not learn. He saw

few fugitives until, in a grass lane towards High Barnet, he happened

upon two ladies who became his fellow travellers. He came upon them

just in time to save them.

He heard their screams, and, hurrying round the corner, saw a couple of

men struggling to drag them out of the little pony-chaise in which they

had been driving, while a third with difficulty held the frightened

pony’s head. One of the ladies, a short woman dressed in white, was

simply screaming; the other, a dark, slender figure, slashed at the man

who gripped her arm with a whip she held in her disengaged hand.

My brother immediately grasped the situation, shouted, and hurried

towards the struggle. One of the men desisted and turned towards him,

and my brother, realising from his antagonist’s face that a fight was

unavoidable, and being an expert boxer, went into him forthwith and

sent him down against the wheel of the chaise.

It was no time for pugilistic chivalry and my brother laid him quiet

with a kick, and gripped the collar of the man who pulled at the

slender lady’s arm. He heard the clatter of hoofs, the whip stung

across his face, a third antagonist struck him between the eyes, and

the man he held wrenched himself free and made off down the lane in the

direction from which he had come.

Partly stunned, he found himself facing the man who had held the

horse’s head, and became aware of the chaise receding from him down the

lane, swaying from side to side, and with the women in it looking back.

The man before him, a burly rough, tried to close, and he stopped him

with a blow in the face. Then, realising that he was deserted, he

dodged round and made off down the lane after the chaise, with the

sturdy man close behind him, and the fugitive, who had turned now,

following remotely.

Suddenly he stumbled and fell; his immediate pursuer went headlong, and

he rose to his feet to find himself with a couple of antagonists again.

He would have had little chance against them had not the slender lady

very pluckily pulled up and returned to his help. It seems she had had

a revolver all this time, but it had been under the seat when she and

her companion were attacked. She fired at six yards’ distance, narrowly

missing my brother. The less courageous of the robbers made off, and

his companion followed him, cursing his cowardice. They both stopped in

sight down the lane, where the third man lay insensible.

“Take this!” said the slender lady, and she gave my brother her

revolver.

“Go back to the chaise,” said my brother, wiping the blood from his

split lip.

She turned without a word—they were both panting—and they went back to

where the lady in white struggled to hold back the frightened pony.

The robbers had evidently had enough of it. When my brother looked

again they were retreating.

“I’ll sit here,” said my brother, “if I may”; and he got upon the empty

front seat. The lady looked over her shoulder.

“Give me the reins,” she said, and laid the whip along the pony’s side.

In another moment a bend in the road hid the three men from my

brother’s eyes.

So, quite unexpectedly, my brother found himself, panting, with a cut

mouth, a bruised jaw, and bloodstained knuckles, driving along an

unknown lane with these two women.

He learned they were the wife and the younger sister of a surgeon

living at Stanmore, who had come in the small hours from a dangerous

case at Pinner, and heard at some railway station on his way of the

Martian advance. He had hurried home, roused the women—their servant

had left them two days before—packed some provisions, put his revolver

under the seat—luckily for my brother—and told them to drive on to

Edgware, with the idea of getting a train there. He stopped behind to

tell the neighbours. He would overtake them, he said, at about half

past four in the morning, and now it was nearly nine and they had seen

nothing of him. They could not stop in Edgware because of the growing

traffic through the place, and so they had come into this side lane.

That was the story they told my brother in fragments when presently

they stopped again, nearer to New Barnet. He promised to stay with

them, at least until they could determine what to do, or until the

missing man arrived, and professed to be an expert shot with the

revolver—a weapon strange to him—in order to give them confidence.

They made a sort of encampment by the wayside, and the pony became

happy in the hedge. He told them of his own escape out of London, and

all that he knew of these Martians and their ways. The sun crept higher

in the sky, and after a time their talk died out and gave place to an

uneasy state of anticipation. Several wayfarers came along the lane,

and of these my brother gathered such news as he could. Every broken

answer he had deepened his impression of the great disaster that had

come on humanity, deepened his persuasion of the immediate necessity

for prosecuting this flight. He urged the matter upon them.

“We have money,” said the slender woman, and hesitated.

Her eyes met my brother’s, and her hesitation ended.

“So have I,” said my brother.

She explained that they had as much as thirty pounds in gold, besides a

five-pound note, and suggested that with that they might get upon a

train at St. Albans or New Barnet. My brother thought that was

hopeless, seeing the fury of the Londoners to crowd upon the trains,

and broached his own idea of striking across Essex towards Harwich and

thence escaping from the country altogether.

Mrs. Elphinstone—that was the name of the woman in white—would listen

to no reasoning, and kept calling upon “George”; but her sister-in-law

was astonishingly quiet and deliberate, and at last agreed to my

brother’s suggestion. So, designing to cross the Great North Road, they

went on towards Barnet, my brother leading the pony to save it as much

as possible. As the sun crept up the sky the day became excessively

hot, and under foot a thick, whitish sand grew burning and blinding, so

that they travelled only very slowly. The hedges were grey with dust.

And as they advanced towards Barnet a tumultuous murmuring grew

stronger.

They began to meet more people. For the most part these were staring

before them, murmuring indistinct questions, jaded, haggard, unclean.

One man in evening dress passed them on foot, his eyes on the ground.

They heard his voice, and, looking back at him, saw one hand clutched

in his hair and the other beating invisible things. His paroxysm of

rage over, he went on his way without once looking back.

As my brother’s party went on towards the crossroads to the south of

Barnet they saw a woman approaching the road across some fields on

their left, carrying a child and with two other children; and then

passed a man in dirty black, with a thick stick in one hand and a small

portmanteau in the other. Then round the corner of the lane, from

between the villas that guarded it at its confluence with the high

road, came a little cart drawn by a sweating black pony and driven by a

sallow youth in a bowler hat, grey with dust. There were three girls,

East End factory girls, and a couple of little children crowded in the

cart.

“This’ll tike us rahnd Edgware?” asked the driver, wild-eyed,

white-faced; and when my brother told him it would if he turned to the

left, he whipped up at once without the formality of thanks.

My brother noticed a pale grey smoke or haze rising among the houses in

front of them, and veiling the white façade of a terrace beyond the

road that appeared between the backs of the villas. Mrs. Elphinstone

suddenly cried out at a number of tongues of smoky red flame leaping up

above the houses in front of them against the hot, blue sky. The

tumultuous noise resolved itself now into the disorderly mingling of

many voices, the gride of many wheels, the creaking of waggons, and the

staccato of hoofs. The lane came round sharply not fifty yards from the

crossroads.

“Good heavens!” cried Mrs. Elphinstone. “What is this you are driving

us into?”

My brother stopped.

For the main road was a boiling stream of people, a torrent of human

beings rushing northward, one pressing on another. A great bank of

dust, white and luminous in the blaze of the sun, made everything

within twenty feet of the ground grey and indistinct and was

perpetually renewed by the hurrying feet of a dense crowd of horses and

of men and women on foot, and by the wheels of vehicles of every

description.

“Way!” my brother heard voices crying. “Make way!”

It was like riding into the smoke of a fire to approach the meeting

point of the lane and road; the crowd roared like a fire, and the dust

was hot and pungent. And, indeed, a little way up the road a villa was

burning and sending rolling masses of black smoke across the road to

add to the confusion.

Two men came past them. Then a dirty woman, carrying a heavy bundle and

weeping. A lost retriever dog, with hanging tongue, circled dubiously

round them, scared and wretched, and fled at my brother’s threat.

So much as they could see of the road Londonward between the houses to

the right was a tumultuous stream of dirty, hurrying people, pent in

between the villas on either side; the black heads, the crowded forms,

grew into distinctness as they rushed towards the corner, hurried past,

and merged their individuality again in a receding multitude that was

swallowed up at last in a cloud of dust.

“Go on! Go on!” cried the voices. “Way! Way!”

One man’s hands pressed on the back of another. My brother stood at the

pony’s head. Irresistibly attracted, he advanced slowly, pace by pace,

down the lane.

Edgware had been a scene of confusion, Chalk Farm a riotous tumult, but

this was a whole population in movement. It is hard to imagine that

host. It had no character of its own. The figures poured out past the

corner, and receded with their backs to the group in the lane. Along

the margin came those who were on foot threatened by the wheels,

stumbling in the ditches, blundering into one another.

The carts and carriages crowded close upon one another, making little

way for those swifter and more impatient vehicles that darted forward

every now and then when an opportunity showed itself of doing so,

sending the people scattering against the fences and gates of the

villas.

“Push on!” was the cry. “Push on! They are coming!”

In one cart stood a blind man in the uniform of the Salvation Army,

gesticulating with his crooked fingers and bawling, “Eternity!

Eternity!” His voice was hoarse and very loud so that my brother could

hear him long after he was lost to sight in the dust. Some of the

people who crowded in the carts whipped stupidly at their horses and

quarrelled with other drivers; some sat motionless, staring at nothing

with miserable eyes; some gnawed their hands with thirst, or lay

prostrate in the bottoms of their conveyances. The horses’ bits were

covered with foam, their eyes bloodshot.

There were cabs, carriages, shop-carts, waggons, beyond counting; a

mail cart, a road-cleaner’s cart marked “Vestry of St. Pancras,” a huge

timber waggon crowded with roughs. A brewer’s dray rumbled by with its

two near wheels splashed with fresh blood.

“Clear the way!” cried the voices. “Clear the way!”

“Eter-nity! Eter-nity!” came echoing down the road.

There were sad, haggard women tramping by, well dressed, with children

that cried and stumbled, their dainty clothes smothered in dust, their

weary faces smeared with tears. With many of these came men, sometimes

helpful, sometimes lowering and savage. Fighting side by side with them

pushed some weary street outcast in faded black rags, wide-eyed,

loud-voiced, and foul-mouthed. There were sturdy workmen thrusting

their way along, wretched, unkempt men, clothed like clerks or shopmen,

struggling spasmodically; a wounded soldier my brother noticed, men

dressed in the clothes of railway porters, one wretched creature in a

nightshirt with a coat thrown over it.

But varied as its composition was, certain things all that host had in

common. There were fear and pain on their faces, and fear behind them.

A tumult up the road, a quarrel for a place in a waggon, sent the whole

host of them quickening their pace; even a man so scared and broken

that his knees bent under him was galvanised for a moment into renewed

activity. The heat and dust had already been at work upon this

multitude. Their skins were dry, their lips black and cracked. They

were all thirsty, weary, and footsore. And amid the various cries one

heard disputes, reproaches, groans of weariness and fatigue; the voices

of most of them were hoarse and weak. Through it all ran a refrain:

“Way! Way! The shctf{wow\_its\_the\_martians} are coming!”

Few stopped and came aside from that flood. The lane opened slantingly

into the main road with a narrow opening, and had a delusive appearance

of coming from the direction of London. Yet a kind of eddy of people

drove into its mouth; weaklings elbowed out of the stream, who for the

most part rested but a moment before plunging into it again. A little

way down the lane, with two friends bending over him, lay a man with a

bare leg, wrapped about with bloody rags. He was a lucky man to have

friends.

A little old man, with a grey military moustache and a filthy black

frock coat, limped out and sat down beside the trap, removed his

boot—his sock was blood-stained—shook out a pebble, and hobbled on

again; and then a little girl of eight or nine, all alone, threw

herself under the hedge close by my brother, weeping.

“I can’t go on! I can’t go on!”

My brother woke from his torpor of astonishment and lifted her up,

speaking gently to her, and carried her to Miss Elphinstone. So soon as

my brother touched her she became quite still, as if frightened.

“Ellen!” shrieked a woman in the crowd, with tears in her

voice—“Ellen!” And the child suddenly darted away from my brother,

crying “Mother!”

“They are coming,” said a man on horseback, riding past along the lane.

“Out of the way, there!” bawled a coachman, towering high; and my

brother saw a closed carriage turning into the lane.

The people crushed back on one another to avoid the horse. My brother

pushed the pony and chaise back into the hedge, and the man drove by

and stopped at the turn of the way. It was a carriage, with a pole for

a pair of horses, but only one was in the traces. My brother saw dimly

through the dust that two men lifted out something on a white stretcher

and put it gently on the grass beneath the privet hedge.

One of the men came running to my brother.

“Where is there any water?” he said. “He is dying fast, and very

thirsty. It is Lord Garrick.”

“Lord Garrick!” said my brother; “the Chief Justice?”

“The water?” he said.

“There may be a tap,” said my brother, “in some of the houses. We have

no water. I dare not leave my people.”

The man pushed against the crowd towards the gate of the corner house.

“Go on!” said the people, thrusting at him. “They are coming! Go on!”

Then my brother’s attention was distracted by a bearded, eagle-faced

man lugging a small handbag, which split even as my brother’s eyes

rested on it and disgorged a mass of sovereigns that seemed to break up

into separate coins as it struck the ground. They rolled hither and

thither among the struggling feet of men and horses. The man stopped

and looked stupidly at the heap, and the shaft of a cab struck his

shoulder and sent him reeling. He gave a shriek and dodged back, and a

cartwheel shaved him narrowly.

“Way!” cried the men all about him. “Make way!”

So soon as the cab had passed, he flung himself, with both hands open,

upon the heap of coins, and began thrusting handfuls in his pocket. A

horse rose close upon him, and in another moment, half rising, he had

been borne down under the horse’s hoofs.

“Stop!” screamed my brother, and pushing a woman out of his way, tried

to clutch the bit of the horse.

Before he could get to it, he heard a scream under the wheels, and saw

through the dust the rim passing over the poor wretch’s back. The

driver of the cart slashed his whip at my brother, who ran round behind

the cart. The multitudinous shouting confused his ears. The man was

writhing in the dust among his scattered money, unable to rise, for the

wheel had broken his back, and his lower limbs lay limp and dead. My

brother stood up and yelled at the next driver, and a man on a black

horse came to his assistance.

“Get him out of the road,” said he; and, clutching the man’s collar

with his free hand, my brother lugged him sideways. But he still

clutched after his money, and regarded my brother fiercely, hammering

at his arm with a handful of gold. “Go on! Go on!” shouted angry voices

behind. “Way! Way!”

There was a smash as the pole of a carriage crashed into the cart that

the man on horseback stopped. My brother looked up, and the man with

the gold twisted his head round and bit the wrist that held his collar.

There was a concussion, and the black horse came staggering sideways,

and the carthorse pushed beside it. A hoof missed my brother’s foot by

a hair’s breadth. He released his grip on the fallen man and jumped

back. He saw anger change to terror on the face of the poor wretch on

the ground, and in a moment he was hidden and my brother was borne

backward and carried past the entrance of the lane, and had to fight

hard in the torrent to recover it.

He saw Miss Elphinstone covering her eyes, and a little child, with all

a child’s want of sympathetic imagination, staring with dilated eyes at

a dusty something that lay black and still, ground and crushed under

the rolling wheels. “Let us go back!” he shouted, and began turning the

pony round. “We cannot cross this—hell,” he said and they went back a

hundred yards the way they had come, until the fighting crowd was

hidden. As they passed the bend in the lane my brother saw the face of

the dying man in the ditch under the privet, deadly white and drawn,

and shining with perspiration. The two women sat silent, crouching in

their seat and shivering.

Then beyond the bend my brother stopped again. Miss Elphinstone was

white and pale, and her sister-in-law sat weeping, too wretched even to

call upon “George.” My brother was horrified and perplexed. So soon as

they had retreated he realised how urgent and unavoidable it was to

attempt this crossing. He turned to Miss Elphinstone, suddenly

resolute.

“We must go that way,” he said, and led the pony round again.

For the second time that day this girl proved her quality. To force

their way into the torrent of people, my brother plunged into the

traffic and held back a cab horse, while she drove the pony across its

head. A waggon locked wheels for a moment and ripped a long splinter

from the chaise. In another moment they were caught and swept forward

by the stream. My brother, with the cabman’s whip marks red across his

face and hands, scrambled into the chaise and took the reins from her.

“Point the revolver at the man behind,” he said, giving it to her, “if

he presses us too hard. No!—point it at his horse.”

Then he began to look out for a chance of edging to the right across

the road. But once in the stream he seemed to lose volition, to become

a part of that dusty rout. They swept through Chipping Barnet with the

torrent; they were nearly a mile beyond the centre of the town before

they had fought across to the opposite side of the way. It was din and

confusion indescribable; but in and beyond the town the road forks

repeatedly, and this to some extent relieved the stress.

They struck eastward through Hadley, and there on either side of the

road, and at another place farther on they came upon a great multitude

of people drinking at the stream, some fighting to come at the water.

And farther on, from a lull near East Barnet, they saw two trains

running slowly one after the other without signal or order—trains

swarming with people, with men even among the coals behind the

engines—going northward along the Great Northern Railway. My brother

supposes they must have filled outside London, for at that time the

furious terror of the people had rendered the central termini

impossible.

Near this place they halted for the rest of the afternoon, for the

violence of the day had already utterly exhausted all three of them.

They began to suffer the beginnings of hunger; the night was cold, and

none of them dared to sleep. And in the evening many people came

hurrying along the road nearby their stopping place, fleeing from

unknown dangers before them, and going in the direction from which my

brother had come.

XVII.

THE “THUNDER CHILD”.

Had the Martians aimed only at destruction, they might on Monday have

annihilated the entire population of London, as it spread itself slowly

through the home counties. Not only along the road through Barnet, but

also through Edgware and Waltham Abbey, and along the roads eastward to

Southend and Shoeburyness, and south of the Thames to Deal and

Broadstairs, poured the same frantic rout. If one could have hung that

June morning in a balloon in the blazing blue above London every

northward and eastward road running out of the tangled maze of streets

would have seemed stippled black with the streaming fugitives, each dot

a human agony of terror and physical distress. I have set forth at

length in the last chapter my brother’s account of the road through

Chipping Barnet, in order that my readers may realise how that swarming

of black dots appeared to one of those concerned. Never before in the

history of the world had such a mass of human beings moved and suffered

together. The legendary hosts of Goths and Huns, the hugest armies Asia

has ever seen, would have been but a drop in that current. And this was

no disciplined march; it was a stampede—a stampede gigantic and

terrible—without order and without a goal, six million people unarmed

and unprovisioned, driving headlong. It was the beginning of the rout

of civilisation, of the massacre of mankind.

Directly below him the balloonist would have seen the network of

streets far and wide, houses, churches, squares, crescents,

gardens—already derelict—spread out like a huge map, and in the

southward \_blotted\_. Over Ealing, Richmond, Wimbledon, it would have

seemed as if some monstrous pen had flung ink upon the chart. Steadily,

incessantly, each black splash grew and spread, shooting out

ramifications this way and that, now banking itself against rising

ground, now pouring swiftly over a crest into a new-found valley,

exactly as a gout of ink would spread itself upon blotting paper.

And beyond, over the blue hills that rise southward of the river, the

glittering Martians went to and fro, calmly and methodically spreading

their poison cloud over this patch of country and then over that,

laying it again with their steam jets when it had served its purpose,

and taking possession of the conquered country. They do not seem to

have aimed at extermination so much as at complete demoralisation and

the destruction of any opposition. They exploded any stores of powder

they came upon, cut every telegraph, and wrecked the railways here and

there. They were hamstringing mankind. They seemed in no hurry to

extend the field of their operations, and did not come beyond the

central part of London all that day. It is possible that a very

considerable number of people in London stuck to their houses through

Monday morning. Certain it is that many died at home suffocated by the

Black Smoke.

Until about midday the Pool of London was an astonishing scene.

Steamboats and shipping of all sorts lay there, tempted by the enormous

sums of money offered by fugitives, and it is said that many who swam

out to these vessels were thrust off with boathooks and drowned. About

one o’clock in the afternoon the thinning remnant of a cloud of the

black vapour appeared between the arches of Blackfriars Bridge. At that

the Pool became a scene of mad confusion, fighting, and collision, and

for some time a multitude of boats and barges jammed in the northern

arch of the Tower Bridge, and the sailors and lightermen had to fight

savagely against the people who swarmed upon them from the riverfront.

People were actually clambering down the piers of the bridge from

above.

When, an hour later, a Martian appeared beyond the Clock Tower and

waded down the river, nothing but wreckage floated above Limehouse.

Of the falling of the fifth cylinder I have presently to tell. The

sixth star fell at Wimbledon. My brother, keeping watch beside the

women in the chaise in a meadow, saw the green flash of it far beyond

the hills. On Tuesday the little party, still set upon getting across

the sea, made its way through the swarming country towards Colchester.

The news that the Martians were now in possession of the whole of

London was confirmed. They had been seen at Highgate, and even, it was

said, at Neasden. But they did not come into my brother’s view until

the morrow.

That day the scattered multitudes began to realise the urgent need of

provisions. As they grew hungry the rights of property ceased to be

regarded. Farmers were out to defend their cattle-sheds, granaries, and

ripening root crops with arms in their hands. A number of people now,

like my brother, had their faces eastward, and there were some

desperate souls even going back towards London to get food. These were

chiefly people from the northern suburbs, whose knowledge of the Black

Smoke came by hearsay. He heard that about half the members of the

government had gathered at Birmingham, and that enormous quantities of

high explosives were being prepared to be used in automatic mines

across the Midland counties.

He was also told that the Midland Railway Company had replaced the

desertions of the first day’s panic, had resumed traffic, and was

running northward trains from St. Albans to relieve the congestion of

the home counties. There was also a placard in Chipping Ongar

announcing that large stores of flour were available in the northern

towns and that within twenty-four hours bread would be distributed

among the starving people in the neighbourhood. But this intelligence

did not deter him from the plan of escape he had formed, and the three

pressed eastward all day, and heard no more of the bread distribution

than this promise. Nor, as a matter of fact, did anyone else hear more

of it. That night fell the seventh star, falling upon Primrose Hill. It

fell while Miss Elphinstone was watching, for she took that duty

alternately with my brother. She saw it.

On Wednesday the three fugitives—they had passed the night in a field

of unripe wheat—reached Chelmsford, and there a body of the

inhabitants, calling itself the Committee of Public Supply, seized the

pony as provisions, and would give nothing in exchange for it but the

promise of a share in it the next day. Here there were rumours of

Martians at Epping, and news of the destruction of Waltham Abbey Powder

Mills in a vain attempt to blow up one of the invaders.

People were watching for Martians here from the church towers. My

brother, very luckily for him as it chanced, preferred to push on at

once to the coast rather than wait for food, although all three of them

were very hungry. By midday they passed through Tillingham, which,

strangely enough, seemed to be quite silent and deserted, save for a

few furtive plunderers hunting for food. Near Tillingham they suddenly

came in sight of the sea, and the most amazing crowd of shipping of all

sorts that it is possible to imagine.

For after the sailors could no longer come up the Thames, they came on

to the Essex coast, to Harwich and Walton and Clacton, and afterwards

to Foulness and Shoebury, to bring off the people. They lay in a huge

sickle-shaped curve that vanished into mist at last towards the Naze.

Close inshore was a multitude of fishing smacks—English, Scotch,

French, Dutch, and Swedish; steam launches from the Thames, yachts,

electric boats; and beyond were ships of larger burden, a multitude of

filthy colliers, trim merchantmen, cattle ships, passenger boats,

petroleum tanks, ocean tramps, an old white transport even, neat white

and grey liners from Southampton and Hamburg; and along the blue coast

across the Blackwater my brother could make out dimly a dense swarm of

boats chaffering with the people on the beach, a swarm which also

extended up the Blackwater almost to Maldon.

About a couple of miles out lay an ironclad, very low in the water,

almost, to my brother’s perception, like a water-logged ship. This was

the ram \_Thunder Child\_. It was the only warship in sight, but far away

to the right over the smooth surface of the sea—for that day there was

a dead calm—lay a serpent of black smoke to mark the next ironclads of

the Channel Fleet, which hovered in an extended line, steam up and

ready for action, across the Thames estuary during the course of the

Martian conquest, vigilant and yet powerless to prevent it.

At the sight of the sea, Mrs. Elphinstone, in spite of the assurances

of her sister-in-law, gave way to panic. She had never been out of

England before, she would rather die than trust herself friendless in a

foreign country, and so forth. She seemed, poor woman, to imagine that

the French and the Martians might prove very similar. She had been

growing increasingly hysterical, fearful, and depressed during the two

days’ journeyings. Her great idea was to return to Stanmore. Things had

been always well and safe at Stanmore. They would find George at

Stanmore....

It was with the greatest difficulty they could get her down to the

beach, where presently my brother succeeded in attracting the attention

of some men on a paddle steamer from the Thames. They sent a boat and

drove a bargain for thirty-six pounds for the three. The steamer was

going, these men said, to Ostend.

It was about two o’clock when my brother, having paid their fares at

the gangway, found himself safely aboard the steamboat with his

charges. There was food aboard, albeit at exorbitant prices, and the

three of them contrived to eat a meal on one of the seats forward.

There were already a couple of score of passengers aboard, some of whom

had expended their last money in securing a passage, but the captain

lay off the Blackwater until five in the afternoon, picking up

passengers until the seated decks were even dangerously crowded. He

would probably have remained longer had it not been for the sound of

guns that began about that hour in the south. As if in answer, the

ironclad seaward fired a small gun and hoisted a string of flags. A jet

of smoke sprang out of her funnels.

Some of the passengers were of opinion that this firing came from

Shoeburyness, until it was noticed that it was growing louder. At the

same time, far away in the southeast the masts and upperworks of three

ironclads rose one after the other out of the sea, beneath clouds of

black smoke. But my brother’s attention speedily reverted to the

distant firing in the south. He fancied he saw a column of smoke rising

out of the distant grey haze.

The little steamer was already flapping her way eastward of the big

crescent of shipping, and the low Essex coast was growing blue and

hazy, when a Martian appeared, small and faint in the remote distance,

advancing along the muddy coast from the direction of Foulness. At that

the captain on the bridge swore at the top of his voice with fear and

anger at his own delay, and the paddles seemed infected with his

terror. Every soul aboard stood at the bulwarks or on the seats of the

steamer and stared at that distant shape, higher than the trees or

church towers inland, and advancing with a leisurely parody of a human

stride.

It was the first Martian my brother had seen, and he stood, more amazed

than terrified, watching this Titan advancing deliberately towards the

shipping, wading farther and farther into the water as the coast fell

away. Then, far away beyond the Crouch, came another, striding over

some stunted trees, and then yet another, still farther off, wading

deeply through a shiny mudflat that seemed to hang halfway up between

sea and sky. They were all stalking seaward, as if to intercept the

escape of the multitudinous vessels that were crowded between Foulness

and the Naze. In spite of the throbbing exertions of the engines of the

little paddle-boat, and the pouring foam that her wheels flung behind

her, she receded with terrifying slowness from this ominous advance.

Glancing northwestward, my brother saw the large crescent of shipping

already writhing with the approaching terror; one ship passing behind

another, another coming round from broadside to end on, steamships

whistling and giving off volumes of steam, sails being let out,

launches rushing hither and thither. He was so fascinated by this and

by the creeping danger away to the left that he had no eyes for

anything seaward. And then a swift movement of the steamboat (she had

suddenly come round to avoid being run down) flung him headlong from

the seat upon which he was standing. There was a shouting all about

him, a trampling of feet, and a cheer that seemed to be answered

faintly. The steamboat lurched and rolled him over upon his hands.

He sprang to his feet and saw to starboard, and not a hundred yards

from their heeling, pitching boat, a vast iron bulk like the blade of a

plough tearing through the water, tossing it on either side in huge

waves of foam that leaped towards the steamer, flinging her paddles

helplessly in the air, and then sucking her deck down almost to the

waterline.

A douche of spray blinded my brother for a moment. When his eyes were

clear again he saw the monster had passed and was rushing landward. Big

iron upperworks rose out of this headlong structure, and from that twin

funnels projected and spat a smoking blast shot with fire. It was the

torpedo ram, \_Thunder Child\_, steaming headlong, coming to the rescue

of the threatened shipping.

Keeping his footing on the heaving deck by clutching the bulwarks, my

brother looked past this charging leviathan at the Martians again, and

he saw the three of them now close together, and standing so far out to

sea that their tripod supports were almost entirely submerged. Thus

sunken, and seen in remote perspective, they appeared far less

formidable than the huge iron bulk in whose wake the steamer was

pitching so helplessly. It would seem they were regarding this new

antagonist with astonishment. To their intelligence, it may be, the

giant was even such another as themselves. The \_Thunder Child\_ fired no

gun, but simply drove full speed towards them. It was probably her not

firing that enabled her to get so near the enemy as she did. They did

not know what to make of her. One shell, and they would have sent her

to the bottom forthwith with the Heat-Ray.

She was steaming at such a pace that in a minute she seemed halfway

between the steamboat and the Martians—a diminishing black bulk against

the receding horizontal expanse of the Essex coast.

Suddenly the foremost Martian lowered his tube and discharged a

canister of the black gas at the ironclad. It hit her larboard side and

glanced off in an inky jet that rolled away to seaward, an unfolding

torrent of Black Smoke, from which the ironclad drove clear. To the

watchers from the steamer, low in the water and with the sun in their

eyes, it seemed as though she were already among the Martians.

They saw the gaunt figures separating and rising out of the water as

they retreated shoreward, and one of them raised the camera-like

generator of the Heat-Ray. He held it pointing obliquely downward, and

a bank of steam sprang from the water at its touch. It must have driven

through the iron of the ship’s side like a white-hot iron rod through

paper.

A flicker of flame went up through the rising steam, and then the

Martian reeled and staggered. In another moment he was cut down, and a

great body of water and steam shot high in the air. The guns of the

\_Thunder Child\_ sounded through the reek, going off one after the

other, and one shot splashed the water high close by the steamer,

ricocheted towards the other flying ships to the north, and smashed a

smack to matchwood.

But no one heeded that very much. At the sight of the Martian’s

collapse the captain on the bridge yelled inarticulately, and all the

crowding passengers on the steamer’s stern shouted together. And then

they yelled again. For, surging out beyond the white tumult, drove

something long and black, the flames streaming from its middle parts,

its ventilators and funnels spouting fire.

She was alive still; the steering gear, it seems, was intact and her

engines working. She headed straight for a second Martian, and was

within a hundred yards of him when the Heat-Ray came to bear. Then with

a violent thud, a blinding flash, her decks, her funnels, leaped

upward. The Martian staggered with the violence of her explosion, and

in another moment the flaming wreckage, still driving forward with the

impetus of its pace, had struck him and crumpled him up like a thing of

cardboard. My brother shouted involuntarily. A boiling tumult of steam

hid everything again.

“Two!” yelled the captain.

Everyone was shouting. The whole steamer from end to end rang with

frantic cheering that was taken up first by one and then by all in the

crowding multitude of ships and boats that was driving out to sea.

The steam hung upon the water for many minutes, hiding the third

Martian and the coast altogether. And all this time the boat was

paddling steadily out to sea and away from the fight; and when at last

the confusion cleared, the drifting bank of black vapour intervened,

and nothing of the \_Thunder Child\_ could be made out, nor could the

third Martian be seen. But the ironclads to seaward were now quite

close and standing in towards shore past the steamboat.

The little vessel continued to beat its way seaward, and the ironclads

receded slowly towards the coast, which was hidden still by a marbled

bank of vapour, part steam, part black gas, eddying and combining in

the strangest way. The fleet of refugees was scattering to the

northeast; several smacks were sailing between the ironclads and the

steamboat. After a time, and before they reached the sinking cloud

bank, the warships turned northward, and then abruptly went about and

passed into the thickening haze of evening southward. The coast grew

faint, and at last indistinguishable amid the low banks of clouds that

were gathering about the sinking sun.

Then suddenly out of the golden haze of the sunset came the vibration

of guns, and a form of black shadows moving. Everyone struggled to the

rail of the steamer and peered into the blinding furnace of the west,

but nothing was to be distinguished clearly. A mass of smoke rose

slanting and barred the face of the sun. The steamboat throbbed on its

way through an interminable suspense.

The sun sank into grey clouds, the sky flushed and darkened, the

evening star trembled into sight. It was deep twilight when the captain

cried out and pointed. My brother strained his eyes. Something rushed

up into the sky out of the greyness—rushed slantingly upward and very

swiftly into the luminous clearness above the clouds in the western

sky; something flat and broad, and very large, that swept round in a

vast curve, grew smaller, sank slowly, and vanished again into the grey

mystery of the night. And as it flew it rained down darkness upon the

land.

BOOK TWO

THE EARTH UNDER THE MARTIANS.

I.

UNDER FOOT.

In the first book I have wandered so much from my own adventures to

tell of the experiences of my brother that all through the last two

chapters I and the curate have been lurking in the empty house at

Halliford whither we fled to escape the Black Smoke. There I will

resume. We stopped there all Sunday night and all the next day—the day

of the panic—in a little island of daylight, cut off by the Black Smoke

from the rest of the world. We could do nothing but wait in aching

inactivity during those two weary days.

My mind was occupied by anxiety for my wife. I figured her at

Leatherhead, terrified, in danger, mourning me already as a dead man. I

paced the rooms and cried aloud when I thought of how I was cut off

from her, of all that might happen to her in my absence. My cousin I

knew was brave enough for any emergency, but he was not the sort of man

to realise danger quickly, to rise promptly. What was needed now was

not bravery, but circumspection. My only consolation was to believe

that the Martians were moving Londonward and away from her. Such vague

anxieties keep the mind sensitive and painful. I grew very weary and

irritable with the curate’s perpetual ejaculations; I tired of the

sight of his selfish despair. After some ineffectual remonstrance I

kept away from him, staying in a room—evidently a children’s

schoolroom—containing globes, forms, and copybooks. When he followed me

thither, I went to a box room at the top of the house and, in order to

be alone with my aching miseries, locked myself in.

We were hopelessly hemmed in by the Black Smoke all that day and the

morning of the next. There were signs of people in the next house on

Sunday evening—a face at a window and moving lights, and later the

slamming of a door. But I do not know who these people were, nor what

became of them. We saw nothing of them next day. The Black Smoke

drifted slowly riverward all through Monday morning, creeping nearer

and nearer to us, driving at last along the roadway outside the house

that hid us.

A Martian came across the fields about midday, laying the stuff with a

jet of superheated steam that hissed against the walls, smashed all the

windows it touched, and scalded the curate’s hand as he fled out of the

front room. When at last we crept across the sodden rooms and looked

out again, the country northward was as though a black snowstorm had

passed over it. Looking towards the river, we were astonished to see an

unaccountable redness mingling with the black of the scorched meadows.

For a time we did not see how this change affected our position, save

that we were relieved of our fear of the Black Smoke. But later I

perceived that we were no longer hemmed in, that now we might get away.

So soon as I realised that the way of escape was open, my dream of

action returned. But the curate was lethargic, unreasonable.

“We are safe here,” he repeated; “safe here.”

I resolved to leave him—would that I had! Wiser now for the

artilleryman’s teaching, I sought out food and drink. I had found oil

and rags for my burns, and I also took a hat and a flannel shirt that I

found in one of the bedrooms. When it was clear to him that I meant to

go alone—had reconciled myself to going alone—he suddenly roused

himself to come. And all being quiet throughout the afternoon, we

started about five o’clock, as I should judge, along the blackened road

to Sunbury.

In Sunbury, and at intervals along the road, were dead bodies lying in

contorted attitudes, horses as well as men, overturned carts and

luggage, all covered thickly with black dust. That pall of cindery

powder made me think of what I had read of the destruction of Pompeii.

We got to Hampton Court without misadventure, our minds full of strange

and unfamiliar appearances, and at Hampton Court our eyes were relieved

to find a patch of green that had escaped the suffocating drift. We

went through Bushey Park, with its deer going to and fro under the

chestnuts, and some men and women hurrying in the distance towards

Hampton, and so we came to Twickenham. These were the first people we

saw.

Away across the road the woods beyond Ham and Petersham were still

afire. Twickenham was uninjured by either Heat-Ray or Black Smoke, and

there were more people about here, though none could give us news. For

the most part they were like ourselves, taking advantage of a lull to

shift their quarters. I have an impression that many of the houses here

were still occupied by scared inhabitants, too frightened even for

flight. Here too the evidence of a hasty rout was abundant along the

road. I remember most vividly three smashed bicycles in a heap, pounded

into the road by the wheels of subsequent carts. We crossed Richmond

Bridge about half past eight. We hurried across the exposed bridge, of

course, but I noticed floating down the stream a number of red masses,

some many feet across. I did not know what these were—there was no time

for scrutiny—and I put a more horrible interpretation on them than they

deserved. Here again on the Surrey side were black dust that had once

been smoke, and dead bodies—a heap near the approach to the station;

but we had no glimpse of the Martians until we were some way towards

Barnes.

We saw in the blackened distance a group of three people running down a

side street towards the river, but otherwise it seemed deserted. Up the

hill Richmond town was burning briskly; outside the town of Richmond

there was no trace of the Black Smoke.

Then suddenly, as we approached Kew, came a number of people running,

and the upperworks of a Martian fighting-machine loomed in sight over

the housetops, not a hundred yards away from us. We stood aghast at our

danger, and had the Martian looked down we must immediately have

perished. We were so terrified that we dared not go on, but turned

aside and hid in a shed in a garden. There the curate crouched, weeping

silently, and refusing to stir again.

But my fixed idea of reaching Leatherhead would not let me rest, and in

the twilight I ventured out again. I went through a shrubbery, and

along a passage beside a big house standing in its own grounds, and so

emerged upon the road towards Kew. The curate I left in the shed, but

he came hurrying after me.

That second start was the most foolhardy thing I ever did. For it was

manifest the Martians were about us. No sooner had the curate overtaken

me than we saw either the fighting-machine we had seen before or

another, far away across the meadows in the direction of Kew Lodge.

Four or five little black figures hurried before it across the

green-grey of the field, and in a moment it was evident this Martian

pursued them. In three strides he was among them, and they ran

radiating from his feet in all directions. He used no Heat-Ray to

destroy them, but picked them up one by one. Apparently he tossed them

into the great metallic carrier which projected behind him, much as a

workman’s basket hangs over his shoulder.

It was the first time I realised that the Martians might have any other

purpose than destruction with defeated humanity. We stood for a moment

petrified, then turned and fled through a gate behind us into a walled

garden, fell into, rather than found, a fortunate ditch, and lay there,

scarce daring to whisper to each other until the stars were out.

I suppose it was nearly eleven o’clock before we gathered courage to

start again, no longer venturing into the road, but sneaking along

hedgerows and through plantations, and watching keenly through the

darkness, he on the right and I on the left, for the Martians, who

seemed to be all about us. In one place we blundered upon a scorched

and blackened area, now cooling and ashen, and a number of scattered

dead bodies of men, burned horribly about the heads and trunks but with

their legs and boots mostly intact; and of dead horses, fifty feet,

perhaps, behind a line of four ripped guns and smashed gun carriages.

Sheen, it seemed, had escaped destruction, but the place was silent and

deserted. Here we happened on no dead, though the night was too dark

for us to see into the side roads of the place. In Sheen my companion

suddenly complained of faintness and thirst, and we decided to try one

of the houses.

The first house we entered, after a little difficulty with the window,

was a small semi-detached villa, and I found nothing eatable left in

the place but some mouldy cheese. There was, however, water to drink;

and I took a hatchet, which promised to be useful in our next

house-breaking.

We then crossed to a place where the road turns towards Mortlake. Here

there stood a white house within a walled garden, and in the pantry of

this domicile we found a store of food—two loaves of bread in a pan, an

uncooked steak, and the half of a ham. I give this catalogue so

precisely because, as it happened, we were destined to subsist upon

this store for the next fortnight. Bottled beer stood under a shelf,

and there were two bags of haricot beans and some limp lettuces. This

pantry opened into a kind of wash-up kitchen, and in this was firewood;

there was also a cupboard, in which we found nearly a dozen of

burgundy, tinned soups and salmon, and two tins of biscuits.

We sat in the adjacent kitchen in the dark—for we dared not strike a

light—and ate bread and ham, and drank beer out of the same bottle. The

curate, who was still timorous and restless, was now, oddly enough, for

pushing on, and I was urging him to keep up his strength by eating when

the thing happened that was to imprison us.

“It can’t be midnight yet,” I said, and then came a blinding glare of

vivid green light. Everything in the kitchen leaped out, clearly

visible in green and black, and vanished again. And then followed such

a concussion as I have never heard before or since. So close on the

heels of this as to seem instantaneous came a thud behind me, a clash

of glass, a crash and rattle of falling masonry all about us, and the

plaster of the ceiling came down upon us, smashing into a multitude of

fragments upon our heads. I was knocked headlong across the floor

against the oven handle and stunned. I was insensible for a long time,

the curate told me, and when I came to we were in darkness again, and

he, with a face wet, as I found afterwards, with blood from a cut

forehead, was dabbing water over me.

For some time I could not recollect what had happened. Then things came

to me slowly. A bruise on my temple asserted itself.

“Are you better?” asked the curate in a whisper.

At last I answered him. I sat up.

“Don’t move,” he said. “The floor is covered with smashed crockery from

the dresser. You can’t possibly move without making a noise, and I

fancy \_they\_ are outside.”

We both sat quite silent, so that we could scarcely hear each other

breathing. Everything seemed deadly still, but once something near us,

some plaster or broken brickwork, slid down with a rumbling sound.

Outside and very near was an intermittent, metallic rattle.

“That!” said the curate, when presently it happened again.

“Yes,” I said. “But what is it?”

“A Martian!” said the curate.

I listened again.

“It was not like the Heat-Ray,” I said, and for a time I was inclined

to think one of the great fighting-machines had stumbled against the

house, as I had seen one stumble against the tower of Shepperton

Church.

Our situation was so strange and incomprehensible that for three or

four hours, until the dawn came, we scarcely moved. And then the light

filtered in, not through the window, which remained black, but through

a triangular aperture between a beam and a heap of broken bricks in the

wall behind us. The interior of the kitchen we now saw greyly for the

first time.

The window had been burst in by a mass of garden mould, which flowed

over the table upon which we had been sitting and lay about our feet.

Outside, the soil was banked high against the house. At the top of the

window frame we could see an uprooted drainpipe. The floor was littered

with smashed hardware; the end of the kitchen towards the house was

broken into, and since the daylight shone in there, it was evident the

greater part of the house had collapsed. Contrasting vividly with this

ruin was the neat dresser, stained in the fashion, pale green, and with

a number of copper and tin vessels below it, the wallpaper imitating

blue and white tiles, and a couple of coloured supplements fluttering

from the walls above the kitchen range.

As the dawn grew clearer, we saw through the gap in the wall the body

of a Martian, standing sentinel, I suppose, over the still glowing

cylinder. At the sight of that we crawled as circumspectly as possible

out of the twilight of the kitchen into the darkness of the scullery.

Abruptly the right interpretation dawned upon my mind.

“The fifth cylinder,” I whispered, “the fifth shot from Mars, has

struck this house and buried us under the ruins!”

For a time the curate was silent, and then he whispered:

“God have mercy upon us!”

I heard him presently whimpering to himself.

Save for that sound we lay quite still in the scullery; I for my part

scarce dared breathe, and sat with my eyes fixed on the faint light of

the kitchen door. I could just see the curate’s face, a dim, oval

shape, and his collar and cuffs. Outside there began a metallic

hammering, then a violent hooting, and then again, after a quiet

interval, a hissing like the hissing of an engine. These noises, for

the most part problematical, continued intermittently, and seemed if

anything to increase in number as time wore on. Presently a measured

thudding and a vibration that made everything about us quiver and the

vessels in the pantry ring and shift, began and continued. Once the

light was eclipsed, and the ghostly kitchen doorway became absolutely

dark. For many hours we must have crouched there, silent and shivering,

until our tired attention failed. . . .

At last I found myself awake and very hungry. I am inclined to believe

we must have spent the greater portion of a day before that awakening.

My hunger was at a stride so insistent that it moved me to action. I

told the curate I was going to seek food, and felt my way towards the

pantry. He made me no answer, but so soon as I began eating the faint

noise I made stirred him up and I heard him crawling after me.

II.

WHAT WE SAW FROM THE RUINED HOUSE.

After eating we crept back to the scullery, and there I must have dozed

again, for when presently I looked round I was alone. The thudding

vibration continued with wearisome persistence. I whispered for the

curate several times, and at last felt my way to the door of the

kitchen. It was still daylight, and I perceived him across the room,

lying against the triangular hole that looked out upon the Martians.

His shoulders were hunched, so that his head was hidden from me.

I could hear a number of noises almost like those in an engine shed;

and the place rocked with that beating thud. Through the aperture in

the wall I could see the top of a tree touched with gold and the warm

blue of a tranquil evening sky. For a minute or so I remained watching

the curate, and then I advanced, crouching and stepping with extreme

care amid the broken crockery that littered the floor.

I touched the curate’s leg, and he started so violently that a mass of

plaster went sliding down outside and fell with a loud impact. I

gripped his arm, fearing he might cry out, and for a long time we

crouched motionless. Then I turned to see how much of our rampart

remained. The detachment of the plaster had left a vertical slit open

in the debris, and by raising myself cautiously across a beam I was

able to see out of this gap into what had been overnight a quiet

suburban roadway. Vast, indeed, was the change that we beheld.

The fifth cylinder must have fallen right into the midst of the house

we had first visited. The building had vanished, completely smashed,

pulverised, and dispersed by the blow. The cylinder lay now far beneath

the original foundations—deep in a hole, already vastly larger than the

pit I had looked into at Woking. The earth all round it had splashed

under that tremendous impact—“splashed” is the only word—and lay in

heaped piles that hid the masses of the adjacent houses. It had behaved

exactly like mud under the violent blow of a hammer. Our house had

collapsed backward; the front portion, even on the ground floor, had

been destroyed completely; by a chance the kitchen and scullery had

escaped, and stood buried now under soil and ruins, closed in by tons

of earth on every side save towards the cylinder. Over that aspect we

hung now on the very edge of the great circular pit the Martians were

engaged in making. The heavy beating sound was evidently just behind

us, and ever and again a bright green vapour drove up like a veil

across our peephole.

The cylinder was already opened in the centre of the pit, and on the

farther edge of the pit, amid the smashed and gravel-heaped shrubbery,

one of the great fighting-machines, deserted by its occupant, stood

stiff and tall against the evening sky. At first I scarcely noticed the

pit and the cylinder, although it has been convenient to describe them

first, on account of the extraordinary glittering mechanism I saw busy

in the excavation, and on account of the strange creatures that were

crawling slowly and painfully across the heaped mould near it.

The mechanism it certainly was that held my attention first. It was one

of those complicated fabrics that have since been called

handling-machines, and the study of which has already given such an

enormous impetus to terrestrial invention. As it dawned upon me first,

it presented a sort of metallic spider with five jointed, agile legs,

and with an extraordinary number of jointed levers, bars, and reaching

and clutching tentacles about its body. Most of its arms were

retracted, but with three long tentacles it was fishing out a number of

rods, plates, and bars which lined the covering and apparently

strengthened the walls of the cylinder. These, as it extracted them,

were lifted out and deposited upon a level surface of earth behind it.

Its motion was so swift, complex, and perfect that at first I did not

see it as a machine, in spite of its metallic glitter. The

fighting-machines were coordinated and animated to an extraordinary

pitch, but nothing to compare with this. People who have never seen

these structures, and have only the ill-imagined efforts of artists or

the imperfect descriptions of such eye-witnesses as myself to go upon,

scarcely realise that living quality.

I recall particularly the illustration of one of the first pamphlets to

give a consecutive account of the war. The artist had evidently made a

hasty study of one of the fighting-machines, and there his knowledge

ended. He presented them as tilted, stiff tripods, without either

flexibility or subtlety, and with an altogether misleading monotony of

effect. The pamphlet containing these renderings had a considerable

vogue, and I mention them here simply to warn the reader against the

impression they may have created. They were no more like the Martians I

saw in action than a Dutch doll is like a human being. To my mind, the

pamphlet would have been much better without them.

At first, I say, the handling-machine did not impress me as a machine,

but as a crablike creature with a glittering integument, the

controlling Martian whose delicate tentacles actuated its movements

seeming to be simply the equivalent of the crab’s cerebral portion. But

then I perceived the resemblance of its grey-brown, shiny, leathery

integument to that of the other sprawling bodies beyond, and the true

nature of this dexterous workman dawned upon me. With that realisation

my interest shifted to those other creatures, the real Martians.

Already I had had a transient impression of these, and the first nausea

no longer obscured my observation. Moreover, I was concealed and

motionless, and under no urgency of action.

They were, I now saw, the most unearthly creatures it is possible to

conceive. They were huge round bodies—or, rather, heads—about four feet

in diameter, each body having in front of it a face. This face had no

nostrils—indeed, the Martians do not seem to have had any sense of

smell, but it had a pair of very large dark-coloured eyes, and just

beneath this a kind of fleshy beak. In the back of this head or body—I

scarcely know how to speak of it—was the single tight tympanic surface,

since known to be anatomically an ear, though it must have been almost

useless in our dense air. In a group round the mouth were sixteen

slender, almost whiplike tentacles, arranged in two bunches of eight

each. These bunches have since been named rather aptly, by that

distinguished anatomist, Professor Howes, the \_hands\_. Even as I saw

these Martians for the first time they seemed to be endeavouring to

raise themselves on these hands, but of course, with the increased

weight of terrestrial conditions, this was impossible. There is reason

to suppose that on Mars they may have progressed upon them with some

facility.

The internal anatomy, I may remark here, as dissection has since shown,

was almost equally simple. The greater part of the structure was the

brain, sending enormous nerves to the eyes, ear, and tactile tentacles.

Besides this were the bulky lungs, into which the mouth opened, and the

heart and its vessels. The pulmonary distress caused by the denser

atmosphere and greater gravitational attraction was only too evident in

the convulsive movements of the outer skin.

And this was the sum of the Martian organs. Strange as it may seem to a

human being, all the complex apparatus of digestion, which makes up the

bulk of our bodies, did not exist in the Martians. They were

heads—merely heads. Entrails they had none. They did not eat, much less

digest. Instead, they took the fresh, living blood of other creatures,

and \_injected\_ it into their own veins. I have myself seen this being

done, as I shall mention in its place. But, squeamish as I may seem, I

cannot bring myself to describe what I could not endure even to

continue watching. Let it suffice to say, blood obtained from a still

living animal, in most cases from a human being, was run directly by

means of a little pipette into the recipient canal. . . .

The bare idea of this is no doubt horribly repulsive to us, but at the

same time I think that we should remember how repulsive our carnivorous

habits would seem to an intelligent rabbit.

The physiological advantages of the practice of injection are

undeniable, if one thinks of the tremendous waste of human time and

energy occasioned by eating and the digestive process. Our bodies are

half made up of glands and tubes and organs, occupied in turning

heterogeneous food into blood. The digestive processes and their

reaction upon the nervous system sap our strength and colour our minds.

Men go happy or miserable as they have healthy or unhealthy livers, or

sound gastric glands. But the Martians were lifted above all these

organic fluctuations of mood and emotion.

Their undeniable preference for men as their source of nourishment is

partly explained by the nature of the remains of the victims they had

brought with them as provisions from Mars. These creatures, to judge

from the shrivelled remains that have fallen into human hands, were

bipeds with flimsy, silicious skeletons (almost like those of the

silicious sponges) and feeble musculature, standing about six feet high

and having round, erect heads, and large eyes in flinty sockets. Two or

three of these seem to have been brought in each cylinder, and all were

killed before earth was reached. It was just as well for them, for the

mere attempt to stand upright upon our planet would have broken every

bone in their bodies.

And while I am engaged in this description, I may add in this place

certain further details which, although they were not all evident to us

at the time, will enable the reader who is unacquainted with them to

form a clearer picture of these offensive creatures.

In three other points their physiology differed strangely from ours.

Their organisms did not sleep, any more than the heart of man sleeps.

Since they had no extensive muscular mechanism to recuperate, that

periodical extinction was unknown to them. They had little or no sense

of fatigue, it would seem. On earth they could never have moved without

effort, yet even to the last they kept in action. In twenty-four hours

they did twenty-four hours of work, as even on earth is perhaps the

case with the ants.

In the next place, wonderful as it seems in a sexual world, the

Martians were absolutely without sex, and therefore without any of the

tumultuous emotions that arise from that difference among men. A young

Martian, there can now be no dispute, was really born upon earth during

the war, and it was found attached to its parent, partially \_budded\_

off, just as young lilybulbs bud off, or like the young animals in the

fresh-water polyp.

In man, in all the higher terrestrial animals, such a method of

increase has disappeared; but even on this earth it was certainly the

primitive method. Among the lower animals, up even to those first

cousins of the vertebrated animals, the Tunicates, the two processes

occur side by side, but finally the sexual method superseded its

competitor altogether. On Mars, however, just the reverse has

apparently been the case.

It is worthy of remark that a certain speculative writer of

quasi-scientific repute, writing long before the Martian invasion, did

forecast for man a final structure not unlike the actual Martian

condition. His prophecy, I remember, appeared in November or December,

1893, in a long-defunct publication, the \_Pall Mall Budget\_, and I

recall a caricature of it in a pre-Martian periodical called \_Punch\_.

He pointed out—writing in a foolish, facetious tone—that the perfection

of mechanical appliances must ultimately supersede limbs; the

perfection of chemical devices, digestion; that such organs as hair,

external nose, teeth, ears, and chin were no longer essential parts of

the human being, and that the tendency of natural selection would lie

in the direction of their steady diminution through the coming ages.

The brain alone remained a cardinal necessity. Only one other part of

the body had a strong case for survival, and that was the hand,

“teacher and agent of the brain.” While the rest of the body dwindled,

the hands would grow larger.

There is many a true word written in jest, and here in the Martians we

have beyond dispute the actual accomplishment of such a suppression of

the animal side of the organism by the intelligence. To me it is quite

credible that the Martians may be descended from beings not unlike

ourselves, by a gradual development of brain and hands (the latter

giving rise to the two bunches of delicate tentacles at last) at the

expense of the rest of the body. Without the body the brain would, of

course, become a mere selfish intelligence, without any of the

emotional substratum of the human being.

The last salient point in which the systems of these creatures differed

from ours was in what one might have thought a very trivial particular.

Micro-organisms, which cause so much disease and pain on earth, have

either never appeared upon Mars or Martian sanitary science eliminated

them ages ago. A hundred diseases, all the fevers and contagions of

human life, consumption, cancers, tumours and such morbidities, never

enter the scheme of their life. And speaking of the differences between

the life on Mars and terrestrial life, I may allude here to the curious

suggestions of the red weed.

Apparently the vegetable kingdom in Mars, instead of having green for a

dominant colour, is of a vivid blood-red tint. At any rate, the seeds

which the Martians (intentionally or accidentally) brought with them

gave rise in all cases to red-coloured growths. Only that known

popularly as the red weed, however, gained any footing in competition

with terrestrial forms. The red creeper was quite a transitory growth,

and few people have seen it growing. For a time, however, the red weed

grew with astonishing vigour and luxuriance. It spread up the sides of

the pit by the third or fourth day of our imprisonment, and its

cactus-like branches formed a carmine fringe to the edges of our

triangular window. And afterwards I found it broadcast throughout the

country, and especially wherever there was a stream of water.

The Martians had what appears to have been an auditory organ, a single

round drum at the back of the head-body, and eyes with a visual range

not very different from ours except that, according to Philips, blue

and violet were as black to them. It is commonly supposed that they

communicated by sounds and tentacular gesticulations; this is asserted,

for instance, in the able but hastily compiled pamphlet (written

evidently by someone not an eye-witness of Martian actions) to which I

have already alluded, and which, so far, has been the chief source of

information concerning them. Now no surviving human being saw so much

of the Martians in action as I did. I take no credit to myself for an

accident, but the fact is so. And I assert that I watched them closely

time after time, and that I have seen four, five, and (once) six of

them sluggishly performing the most elaborately complicated operations

together without either sound or gesture. Their peculiar hooting

invariably preceded feeding; it had no modulation, and was, I believe,

in no sense a signal, but merely the expiration of air preparatory to

the suctional operation. I have a certain claim to at least an

elementary knowledge of psychology, and in this matter I am

convinced—as firmly as I am convinced of anything—that the Martians

interchanged thoughts without any physical intermediation. And I have

been convinced of this in spite of strong preconceptions. Before the

Martian invasion, as an occasional reader here or there may remember, I

had written with some little vehemence against the telepathic theory.

The Martians wore no clothing. Their conceptions of ornament and

decorum were necessarily different from ours; and not only were they

evidently much less sensible of changes of temperature than we are, but

changes of pressure do not seem to have affected their health at all

seriously. Yet though they wore no clothing, it was in the other

artificial additions to their bodily resources that their great

superiority over man lay. We men, with our bicycles and road-skates,

our Lilienthal soaring-machines, our guns and sticks and so forth, are

just in the beginning of the evolution that the Martians have worked

out. They have become practically mere brains, wearing different bodies

according to their needs just as men wear suits of clothes and take a

bicycle in a hurry or an umbrella in the wet. And of their appliances,

perhaps nothing is more wonderful to a man than the curious fact that

what is the dominant feature of almost all human devices in mechanism

is absent—the \_wheel\_ is absent; among all the things they brought to

earth there is no trace or suggestion of their use of wheels. One would

have at least expected it in locomotion. And in this connection it is

curious to remark that even on this earth Nature has never hit upon the

wheel, or has preferred other expedients to its development. And not

only did the Martians either not know of (which is incredible), or

abstain from, the wheel, but in their apparatus singularly little use

is made of the fixed pivot or relatively fixed pivot, with circular

motions thereabout confined to one plane. Almost all the joints of the

machinery present a complicated system of sliding parts moving over

small but beautifully curved friction bearings. And while upon this

matter of detail, it is remarkable that the long leverages of their

machines are in most cases actuated by a sort of sham musculature of

the disks in an elastic sheath; these disks become polarised and drawn

closely and powerfully together when traversed by a current of

electricity. In this way the curious parallelism to animal motions,

which was so striking and disturbing to the human beholder, was

attained. Such quasi-muscles abounded in the crablike handling-machine

which, on my first peeping out of the slit, I watched unpacking the

cylinder. It seemed infinitely more alive than the actual Martians

lying beyond it in the sunset light, panting, stirring ineffectual

tentacles, and moving feebly after their vast journey across space.

While I was still watching their sluggish motions in the sunlight, and

noting each strange detail of their form, the curate reminded me of his

presence by pulling violently at my arm. I turned to a scowling face,

and silent, eloquent lips. He wanted the slit, which permitted only one

of us to peep through; and so I had to forego watching them for a time

while he enjoyed that privilege.

When I looked again, the busy handling-machine had already put together

several of the pieces of apparatus it had taken out of the cylinder

into a shape having an unmistakable likeness to its own; and down on

the left a busy little digging mechanism had come into view, emitting

jets of green vapour and working its way round the pit, excavating and

embanking in a methodical and discriminating manner. This it was which

had caused the regular beating noise, and the rhythmic shocks that had

kept our ruinous refuge quivering. It piped and whistled as it worked.

So far as I could see, the thing was without a directing Martian at

all.

III.

THE DAYS OF IMPRISONMENT.

The arrival of a second fighting-machine drove us from our peephole

into the scullery, for we feared that from his elevation the Martian

might see down upon us behind our barrier. At a later date we began to

feel less in danger of their eyes, for to an eye in the dazzle of the

sunlight outside our refuge must have been blank blackness, but at

first the slightest suggestion of approach drove us into the scullery

in heart-throbbing retreat. Yet terrible as was the danger we incurred,

the attraction of peeping was for both of us irresistible. And I recall

now with a sort of wonder that, in spite of the infinite danger in

which we were between starvation and a still more terrible death, we

could yet struggle bitterly for that horrible privilege of sight. We

would race across the kitchen in a grotesque way between eagerness and

the dread of making a noise, and strike each other, and thrust and

kick, within a few inches of exposure.

The fact is that we had absolutely incompatible dispositions and habits

of thought and action, and our danger and isolation only accentuated

the incompatibility. At Halliford I had already come to hate the

curate’s trick of helpless exclamation, his stupid rigidity of mind.

His endless muttering monologue vitiated every effort I made to think

out a line of action, and drove me at times, thus pent up and

intensified, almost to the verge of craziness. He was as lacking in

restraint as a silly woman. He would weep for hours together, and I

verily believe that to the very end this spoiled child of life thought

his weak tears in some way efficacious. And I would sit in the darkness

unable to keep my mind off him by reason of his importunities. He ate

more than I did, and it was in vain I pointed out that our only chance

of life was to stop in the house until the Martians had done with their

pit, that in that long patience a time might presently come when we

should need food. He ate and drank impulsively in heavy meals at long

intervals. He slept little.

As the days wore on, his utter carelessness of any consideration so

intensified our distress and danger that I had, much as I loathed doing

it, to resort to threats, and at last to blows. That brought him to

reason for a time. But he was one of those weak creatures, void of

pride, timorous, anæmic, hateful souls, full of shifty cunning, who

face neither God nor man, who face not even themselves.

It is disagreeable for me to recall and write these things, but I set

them down that my story may lack nothing. Those who have escaped the

dark and terrible aspects of life will find my brutality, my flash of

rage in our final tragedy, easy enough to blame; for they know what is

wrong as well as any, but not what is possible to tortured men. But

those who have been under the shadow, who have gone down at last to

elemental things, will have a wider charity.

And while within we fought out our dark, dim contest of whispers,

snatched food and drink, and gripping hands and blows, without, in the

pitiless sunlight of that terrible June, was the strange wonder, the

unfamiliar routine of the Martians in the pit. Let me return to those

first new experiences of mine. After a long time I ventured back to the

peephole, to find that the new-comers had been reinforced by the

occupants of no fewer than three of the fighting-machines. These last

had brought with them certain fresh appliances that stood in an orderly

manner about the cylinder. The second handling-machine was now

completed, and was busied in serving one of the novel contrivances the

big machine had brought. This was a body resembling a milk can in its

general form, above which oscillated a pear-shaped receptacle, and from

which a stream of white powder flowed into a circular basin below.

The oscillatory motion was imparted to this by one tentacle of the

handling-machine. With two spatulate hands the handling-machine was

digging out and flinging masses of clay into the pear-shaped receptacle

above, while with another arm it periodically opened a door and removed

rusty and blackened clinkers from the middle part of the machine.

Another steely tentacle directed the powder from the basin along a

ribbed channel towards some receiver that was hidden from me by the

mound of bluish dust. From this unseen receiver a little thread of

green smoke rose vertically into the quiet air. As I looked, the

handling-machine, with a faint and musical clinking, extended,

telescopic fashion, a tentacle that had been a moment before a mere

blunt projection, until its end was hidden behind the mound of clay. In

another second it had lifted a bar of white aluminium into sight,

untarnished as yet, and shining dazzlingly, and deposited it in a

growing stack of bars that stood at the side of the pit. Between sunset

and starlight this dexterous machine must have made more than a hundred

such bars out of the crude clay, and the mound of bluish dust rose

steadily until it topped the side of the pit.

The contrast between the swift and complex movements of these

contrivances and the inert panting clumsiness of their masters was

acute, and for days I had to tell myself repeatedly that these latter

were indeed the living of the two things.

The curate had possession of the slit when the first men were brought

to the pit. I was sitting below, huddled up, listening with all my

ears. He made a sudden movement backward, and I, fearful that we were

observed, crouched in a spasm of terror. He came sliding down the

rubbish and crept beside me in the darkness, inarticulate,

gesticulating, and for a moment I shared his panic. His gesture

suggested a resignation of the slit, and after a little while my

curiosity gave me courage, and I rose up, stepped across him, and

clambered up to it. At first I could see no reason for his frantic

behaviour. The twilight had now come, the stars were little and faint,

but the pit was illuminated by the flickering green fire that came from

the aluminium-making. The whole picture was a flickering scheme of

green gleams and shifting rusty black shadows, strangely trying to the

eyes. Over and through it all went the bats, heeding it not at all. The

sprawling Martians were no longer to be seen, the mound of blue-green

powder had risen to cover them from sight, and a fighting-machine, with

its legs contracted, crumpled, and abbreviated, stood across the corner

of the pit. And then, amid the clangour of the machinery, came a

drifting suspicion of human voices, that I entertained at first only to

dismiss.

I crouched, watching this fighting-machine closely, satisfying myself

now for the first time that the hood did indeed contain a Martian. As

the green flames lifted I could see the oily gleam of his integument

and the brightness of his eyes. And suddenly I heard a yell, and saw a

long tentacle reaching over the shoulder of the machine to the little

cage that hunched upon its back. Then something—something struggling

violently—was lifted high against the sky, a black, vague enigma

against the starlight; and as this black object came down again, I saw

by the green brightness that it was a man. For an instant he was

clearly visible. He was a stout, ruddy, middle-aged man, well dressed;

three days before, he must have been walking the world, a man of

considerable consequence. I could see his staring eyes and gleams of

light on his studs and watch chain. He vanished behind the mound, and

for a moment there was silence. And then began a shrieking and a

sustained and cheerful hooting from the Martians.

I slid down the rubbish, struggled to my feet, clapped my hands over my

ears, and bolted into the scullery. The curate, who had been crouching

silently with his arms over his head, looked up as I passed, cried out

quite loudly at my desertion of him, and came running after me.

That night, as we lurked in the scullery, balanced between our horror

and the terrible fascination this peeping had, although I felt an

urgent need of action I tried in vain to conceive some plan of escape;

but afterwards, during the second day, I was able to consider our

position with great clearness. The curate, I found, was quite incapable

of discussion; this new and culminating atrocity had robbed him of all

vestiges of reason or forethought. Practically he had already sunk to

the level of an animal. But as the saying goes, I gripped myself with

both hands. It grew upon my mind, once I could face the facts, that

terrible as our position was, there was as yet no justification for

absolute despair. Our chief chance lay in the possibility of the

Martians making the pit nothing more than a temporary encampment. Or

even if they kept it permanently, they might not consider it necessary

to guard it, and a chance of escape might be afforded us. I also

weighed very carefully the possibility of our digging a way out in a

direction away from the pit, but the chances of our emerging within

sight of some sentinel fighting-machine seemed at first too great. And

I should have had to do all the digging myself. The curate would

certainly have failed me.

It was on the third day, if my memory serves me right, that I saw the

lad killed. It was the only occasion on which I actually saw the

Martians feed. After that experience I avoided the hole in the wall for

the better part of a day. I went into the scullery, removed the door,

and spent some hours digging with my hatchet as silently as possible;

but when I had made a hole about a couple of feet deep the loose earth

collapsed noisily, and I did not dare continue. I lost heart, and lay

down on the scullery floor for a long time, having no spirit even to

move. And after that I abandoned altogether the idea of escaping by

excavation.

It says much for the impression the Martians had made upon me that at

first I entertained little or no hope of our escape being brought about

by their overthrow through any human effort. But on the fourth or fifth

night I heard a sound like heavy guns.

It was very late in the night, and the moon was shining brightly. The

Martians had taken away the excavating-machine, and, save for a

fighting-machine that stood in the remoter bank of the pit and a

handling-machine that was buried out of my sight in a corner of the pit

immediately beneath my peephole, the place was deserted by them. Except

for the pale glow from the handling-machine and the bars and patches of

white moonlight the pit was in darkness, and, except for the clinking

of the handling-machine, quite still. That night was a beautiful

serenity; save for one planet, the moon seemed to have the sky to

herself. I heard a dog howling, and that familiar sound it was that

made me listen. Then I heard quite distinctly a booming exactly like

the sound of great guns. Six distinct reports I counted, and after a

long interval six again. And that was all.

IV.

THE DEATH OF THE CURATE.

It was on the sixth day of our imprisonment that I peeped for the last

time, and presently found myself alone. Instead of keeping close to me

and trying to oust me from the slit, the curate had gone back into the

scullery. I was struck by a sudden thought. I went back quickly and

quietly into the scullery. In the darkness I heard the curate drinking.

I snatched in the darkness, and my fingers caught a bottle of burgundy.

For a few minutes there was a tussle. The bottle struck the floor and

broke, and I desisted and rose. We stood panting and threatening each

other. In the end I planted myself between him and the food, and told

him of my determination to begin a discipline. I divided the food in

the pantry, into rations to last us ten days. I would not let him eat

any more that day. In the afternoon he made a feeble effort to get at

the food. I had been dozing, but in an instant I was awake. All day and

all night we sat face to face, I weary but resolute, and he weeping and

complaining of his immediate hunger. It was, I know, a night and a day,

but to me it seemed—it seems now—an interminable length of time.

And so our widened incompatibility ended at last in open conflict. For

two vast days we struggled in undertones and wrestling contests. There

were times when I beat and kicked him madly, times when I cajoled and

persuaded him, and once I tried to bribe him with the last bottle of

burgundy, for there was a rain-water pump from which I could get water.

But neither force nor kindness availed; he was indeed beyond reason. He

would neither desist from his attacks on the food nor from his noisy

babbling to himself. The rudimentary precautions to keep our

imprisonment endurable he would not observe. Slowly I began to realise

the complete overthrow of his intelligence, to perceive that my sole

companion in this close and sickly darkness was a man insane.

From certain vague memories I am inclined to think my own mind wandered

at times. I had strange and hideous dreams whenever I slept. It sounds

paradoxical, but I am inclined to think that the weakness and insanity

of the curate warned me, braced me, and kept me a sane man.

On the eighth day he began to talk aloud instead of whispering, and

nothing I could do would moderate his speech.

“It is just, O God!” he would say, over and over again. “It is just. On

me and mine be the punishment laid. We have sinned, we have fallen

short. There was poverty, sorrow; the poor were trodden in the dust,

and I held my peace. I preached acceptable folly—my God, what

folly!—when I should have stood up, though I died for it, and called

upon them to repent—repent! . . . Oppressors of the poor and needy . .

. ! The wine press of God!”

Then he would suddenly revert to the matter of the food I withheld from

him, praying, begging, weeping, at last threatening. He began to raise

his voice—I prayed him not to. He perceived a hold on me—he threatened

he would shout and bring the Martians upon us. For a time that scared

me; but any concession would have shortened our chance of escape beyond

estimating. I defied him, although I felt no assurance that he might

not do this thing. But that day, at any rate, he did not. He talked

with his voice rising slowly, through the greater part of the eighth

and ninth days—threats, entreaties, mingled with a torrent of half-sane

and always frothy repentance for his vacant sham of God’s service, such

as made me pity him. Then he slept awhile, and began again with renewed

strength, so loudly that I must needs make him desist.

“Be still!” I implored.

He rose to his knees, for he had been sitting in the darkness near the

copper.

“I have been still too long,” he said, in a tone that must have reached

the pit, “and now I must bear my witness. Woe unto this unfaithful

city! Woe! Woe! Woe! Woe! Woe! To the inhabitants of the earth by

reason of the other voices of the trumpet——”

“Shut up!” I said, rising to my feet, and in a terror lest the Martians

should hear us. “For God’s sake——”

“Nay,” shouted the curate, at the top of his voice, standing likewise

and extending his arms. “Speak! The word of the Lord is upon me!”

In three strides he was at the door leading into the kitchen.

“I must bear my witness! I go! It has already been too long delayed.”

I put out my hand and felt the meat chopper hanging to the wall. In a

flash I was after him. I was fierce with fear. Before he was halfway

across the kitchen I had overtaken him. With one last touch of humanity

I turned the blade back and struck him with the butt. He went headlong

forward and lay stretched on the ground. I stumbled over him and stood

panting. He lay still.

Suddenly I heard a noise without, the run and smash of slipping

plaster, and the triangular aperture in the wall was darkened. I looked

up and saw the lower surface of a handling-machine coming slowly across

the hole. One of its gripping limbs curled amid the debris; another

limb appeared, feeling its way over the fallen beams. I stood

petrified, staring. Then I saw through a sort of glass plate near the

edge of the body the face, as we may call it, and the large dark eyes

of a Martian, peering, and then a long metallic snake of tentacle came

feeling slowly through the hole.

I turned by an effort, stumbled over the curate, and stopped at the

scullery door. The tentacle was now some way, two yards or more, in the

room, and twisting and turning, with queer sudden movements, this way

and that. For a while I stood fascinated by that slow, fitful advance.

Then, with a faint, hoarse cry, I forced myself across the scullery. I

trembled violently; I could scarcely stand upright. I opened the door

of the coal cellar, and stood there in the darkness staring at the

faintly lit doorway into the kitchen, and listening. Had the Martian

seen me? What was it doing now?

Something was moving to and fro there, very quietly; every now and then

it tapped against the wall, or started on its movements with a faint

metallic ringing, like the movements of keys on a split-ring. Then a

heavy body—I knew too well what—was dragged across the floor of the

kitchen towards the opening. Irresistibly attracted, I crept to the

door and peeped into the kitchen. In the triangle of bright outer

sunlight I saw the Martian, in its Briareus of a handling-machine,

scrutinizing the curate’s head. I thought at once that it would infer

my presence from the mark of the blow I had given him.

I crept back to the coal cellar, shut the door, and began to cover

myself up as much as I could, and as noiselessly as possible in the

darkness, among the firewood and coal therein. Every now and then I

paused, rigid, to hear if the Martian had thrust its tentacles through

the opening again.

Then the faint metallic jingle returned. I traced it slowly feeling

over the kitchen. Presently I heard it nearer—in the scullery, as I

judged. I thought that its length might be insufficient to reach me. I

prayed copiously. It passed, scraping faintly across the cellar door.

An age of almost intolerable suspense intervened; then I heard it

fumbling at the latch! It had found the door! The Martians understood

doors!

It worried at the catch for a minute, perhaps, and then the door

opened.

In the darkness I could just see the thing—like an elephant’s trunk

more than anything else—waving towards me and touching and examining

the wall, coals, wood and ceiling. It was like a black worm swaying its

blind head to and fro.

Once, even, it touched the heel of my boot. I was on the verge of

screaming; I bit my hand. For a time the tentacle was silent. I could

have fancied it had been withdrawn. Presently, with an abrupt click, it

gripped something—I thought it had me!—and seemed to go out of the

cellar again. For a minute I was not sure. Apparently it had taken a

lump of coal to examine.

I seized the opportunity of slightly shifting my position, which had

become cramped, and then listened. I whispered passionate prayers for

safety.

Then I heard the slow, deliberate sound creeping towards me again.

Slowly, slowly it drew near, scratching against the walls and tapping

the furniture.

While I was still doubtful, it rapped smartly against the cellar door

and closed it. I heard it go into the pantry, and the biscuit-tins

rattled and a bottle smashed, and then came a heavy bump against the

cellar door. Then silence that passed into an infinity of suspense.

Had it gone?

At last I decided that it had.

It came into the scullery no more; but I lay all the tenth day in the

close darkness, buried among coals and firewood, not daring even to

crawl out for the drink for which I craved. It was the eleventh day

before I ventured so far from my security.

V.

THE STILLNESS.

My first act before I went into the pantry was to fasten the door

between the kitchen and the scullery. But the pantry was empty; every

scrap of food had gone. Apparently, the Martian had taken it all on the

previous day. At that discovery I despaired for the first time. I took

no food, or no drink either, on the eleventh or the twelfth day.

At first my mouth and throat were parched, and my strength ebbed

sensibly. I sat about in the darkness of the scullery, in a state of

despondent wretchedness. My mind ran on eating. I thought I had become

deaf, for the noises of movement I had been accustomed to hear from the

pit had ceased absolutely. I did not feel strong enough to crawl

noiselessly to the peephole, or I would have gone there.

On the twelfth day my throat was so painful that, taking the chance of

alarming the Martians, I attacked the creaking rain-water pump that

stood by the sink, and got a couple of glassfuls of blackened and

tainted rain water. I was greatly refreshed by this, and emboldened by

the fact that no enquiring tentacle followed the noise of my pumping.

During these days, in a rambling, inconclusive way, I thought much of

the curate and of the manner of his death.

On the thirteenth day I drank some more water, and dozed and thought

disjointedly of eating and of vague impossible plans of escape.

Whenever I dozed I dreamt of horrible phantasms, of the death of the

curate, or of sumptuous dinners; but, asleep or awake, I felt a keen

pain that urged me to drink again and again. The light that came into

the scullery was no longer grey, but red. To my disordered imagination

it seemed the colour of blood.

On the fourteenth day I went into the kitchen, and I was surprised to

find that the fronds of the red weed had grown right across the hole in

the wall, turning the half-light of the place into a crimson-coloured

obscurity.

It was early on the fifteenth day that I heard a curious, familiar

sequence of sounds in the kitchen, and, listening, identified it as the

snuffing and scratching of a dog. Going into the kitchen, I saw a dog’s

nose peering in through a break among the ruddy fronds. This greatly

surprised me. At the scent of me he barked shortly.

I thought if I could induce him to come into the place quietly I should

be able, perhaps, to kill and eat him; and in any case, it would be

advisable to kill him, lest his actions attracted the attention of the

Martians.

I crept forward, saying “Good dog!” very softly; but he suddenly

withdrew his head and disappeared.

I listened—I was not deaf—but certainly the pit was still. I heard a

sound like the flutter of a bird’s wings, and a hoarse croaking, but

that was all.

For a long while I lay close to the peephole, but not daring to move

aside the red plants that obscured it. Once or twice I heard a faint

pitter-patter like the feet of the dog going hither and thither on the

sand far below me, and there were more birdlike sounds, but that was

all. At length, encouraged by the silence, I looked out.

Except in the corner, where a multitude of crows hopped and fought over

the skeletons of the dead the Martians had consumed, there was not a

living thing in the pit.

I stared about me, scarcely believing my eyes. All the machinery had

gone. Save for the big mound of greyish-blue powder in one corner,

certain bars of aluminium in another, the black birds, and the

skeletons of the killed, the place was merely an empty circular pit in

the sand.

Slowly I thrust myself out through the red weed, and stood upon the

mound of rubble. I could see in any direction save behind me, to the

north, and neither Martians nor sign of Martians were to be seen. The

pit dropped sheerly from my feet, but a little way along the rubbish

afforded a practicable slope to the summit of the ruins. My chance of

escape had come. I began to tremble.

I hesitated for some time, and then, in a gust of desperate resolution,

and with a heart that throbbed violently, I scrambled to the top of the

mound in which I had been buried so long.

I looked about again. To the northward, too, no Martian was visible.

When I had last seen this part of Sheen in the daylight it had been a

straggling street of comfortable white and red houses, interspersed

with abundant shady trees. Now I stood on a mound of smashed brickwork,

clay, and gravel, over which spread a multitude of red cactus-shaped

plants, knee-high, without a solitary terrestrial growth to dispute

their footing. The trees near me were dead and brown, but further a

network of red thread scaled the still living stems.

The neighbouring houses had all been wrecked, but none had been burned;

their walls stood, sometimes to the second story, with smashed windows

and shattered doors. The red weed grew tumultuously in their roofless

rooms. Below me was the great pit, with the crows struggling for its

refuse. A number of other birds hopped about among the ruins. Far away

I saw a gaunt cat slink crouchingly along a wall, but traces of men

there were none.

The day seemed, by contrast with my recent confinement, dazzlingly

bright, the sky a glowing blue. A gentle breeze kept the red weed that

covered every scrap of unoccupied ground gently swaying. And oh! the

sweetness of the air!

VI.

THE WORK OF FIFTEEN DAYS.

For some time I stood tottering on the mound regardless of my safety.

Within that noisome den from which I had emerged I had thought with a

narrow intensity only of our immediate security. I had not realised

what had been happening to the world, had not anticipated this

startling vision of unfamiliar things. I had expected to see Sheen in

ruins—I found about me the landscape, weird and lurid, of another

planet.

For that moment I touched an emotion beyond the common range of men,

yet one that the poor brutes we dominate know only too well. I felt as

a rabbit might feel returning to his burrow and suddenly confronted by

the work of a dozen busy navvies digging the foundations of a house. I

felt the first inkling of a thing that presently grew quite clear in my

mind, that oppressed me for many days, a sense of dethronement, a

persuasion that I was no longer a master, but an animal among the

animals, under the Martian heel. With us it would be as with them, to

lurk and watch, to run and hide; the fear and empire of man had passed

away.

But so soon as this strangeness had been realised it passed, and my

dominant motive became the hunger of my long and dismal fast. In the

direction away from the pit I saw, beyond a red-covered wall, a patch

of garden ground unburied. This gave me a hint, and I went knee-deep,

and sometimes neck-deep, in the red weed. The density of the weed gave

me a reassuring sense of hiding. The wall was some six feet high, and

when I attempted to clamber it I found I could not lift my feet to the

crest. So I went along by the side of it, and came to a corner and a

rockwork that enabled me to get to the top, and tumble into the garden

I coveted. Here I found some young onions, a couple of gladiolus bulbs,

and a quantity of immature carrots, all of which I secured, and,

scrambling over a ruined wall, went on my way through scarlet and

crimson trees towards Kew—it was like walking through an avenue of

gigantic blood drops—possessed with two ideas: to get more food, and to

limp, as soon and as far as my strength permitted, out of this accursed

unearthly region of the pit.

Some way farther, in a grassy place, was a group of mushrooms which

also I devoured, and then I came upon a brown sheet of flowing shallow

water, where meadows used to be. These fragments of nourishment served

only to whet my hunger. At first I was surprised at this flood in a

hot, dry summer, but afterwards I discovered that it was caused by the

tropical exuberance of the red weed. Directly this extraordinary growth

encountered water it straightway became gigantic and of unparalleled

fecundity. Its seeds were simply poured down into the water of the Wey

and Thames, and its swiftly growing and Titanic water fronds speedily

choked both those rivers.

At Putney, as I afterwards saw, the bridge was almost lost in a tangle

of this weed, and at Richmond, too, the Thames water poured in a broad

and shallow stream across the meadows of Hampton and Twickenham. As the

water spread the weed followed them, until the ruined villas of the

Thames valley were for a time lost in this red swamp, whose margin I

explored, and much of the desolation the Martians had caused was

concealed.

In the end the red weed succumbed almost as quickly as it had spread. A

cankering disease, due, it is believed, to the action of certain

bacteria, presently seized upon it. Now by the action of natural

selection, all terrestrial plants have acquired a resisting power

against bacterial diseases—they never succumb without a severe

struggle, but the red weed rotted like a thing already dead. The fronds

became bleached, and then shrivelled and brittle. They broke off at the

least touch, and the waters that had stimulated their early growth

carried their last vestiges out to sea.

My first act on coming to this water was, of course, to slake my

thirst. I drank a great deal of it and, moved by an impulse, gnawed

some fronds of red weed; but they were watery, and had a sickly,

metallic taste. I found the water was sufficiently shallow for me to

wade securely, although the red weed impeded my feet a little; but the

flood evidently got deeper towards the river, and I turned back to

Mortlake. I managed to make out the road by means of occasional ruins

of its villas and fences and lamps, and so presently I got out of this

spate and made my way to the hill going up towards Roehampton and came

out on Putney Common.

Here the scenery changed from the strange and unfamiliar to the

wreckage of the familiar: patches of ground exhibited the devastation

of a cyclone, and in a few score yards I would come upon perfectly

undisturbed spaces, houses with their blinds trimly drawn and doors

closed, as if they had been left for a day by the owners, or as if

their inhabitants slept within. The red weed was less abundant; the

tall trees along the lane were free from the red creeper. I hunted for

food among the trees, finding nothing, and I also raided a couple of

silent houses, but they had already been broken into and ransacked. I

rested for the remainder of the daylight in a shrubbery, being, in my

enfeebled condition, too fatigued to push on.

All this time I saw no human beings, and no signs of the Martians. I

encountered a couple of hungry-looking dogs, but both hurried

circuitously away from the advances I made them. Near Roehampton I had

seen two human skeletons—not bodies, but skeletons, picked clean—and in

the wood by me I found the crushed and scattered bones of several cats

and rabbits and the skull of a sheep. But though I gnawed parts of

these in my mouth, there was nothing to be got from them.

After sunset I struggled on along the road towards Putney, where I

think the Heat-Ray must have been used for some reason. And in the

garden beyond Roehampton I got a quantity of immature potatoes,

sufficient to stay my hunger. From this garden one looked down upon

Putney and the river. The aspect of the place in the dusk was

singularly desolate: blackened trees, blackened, desolate ruins, and

down the hill the sheets of the flooded river, red-tinged with the

weed. And over all—silence. It filled me with indescribable terror to

think how swiftly that desolating change had come.

For a time I believed that mankind had been swept out of existence, and

that I stood there alone, the last man left alive. Hard by the top of

Putney Hill I came upon another skeleton, with the arms dislocated and

removed several yards from the rest of the body. As I proceeded I

became more and more convinced that the extermination of mankind was,

save for such stragglers as myself, already accomplished in this part

of the world. The Martians, I thought, had gone on and left the country

desolated, seeking food elsewhere. Perhaps even now they were

destroying Berlin or Paris, or it might be they had gone northward.

VII.

THE MAN ON PUTNEY HILL.

I spent that night in the inn that stands at the top of Putney Hill,

sleeping in a made bed for the first time since my flight to

Leatherhead. I will not tell the needless trouble I had breaking into

that house—afterwards I found the front door was on the latch—nor how I

ransacked every room for food, until just on the verge of despair, in

what seemed to me to be a servant’s bedroom, I found a rat-gnawed crust

and two tins of pineapple. The place had been already searched and

emptied. In the bar I afterwards found some biscuits and sandwiches

that had been overlooked. The latter I could not eat, they were too

rotten, but the former not only stayed my hunger, but filled my

pockets. I lit no lamps, fearing some Martian might come beating that

part of London for food in the night. Before I went to bed I had an

interval of restlessness, and prowled from window to window, peering

out for some sign of these monsters. I slept little. As I lay in bed I

found myself thinking consecutively—a thing I do not remember to have

done since my last argument with the curate. During all the intervening

time my mental condition had been a hurrying succession of vague

emotional states or a sort of stupid receptivity. But in the night my

brain, reinforced, I suppose, by the food I had eaten, grew clear

again, and I thought.

Three things struggled for possession of my mind: the killing of the

curate, the whereabouts of the Martians, and the possible fate of my

wife. The former gave me no sensation of horror or remorse to recall; I

saw it simply as a thing done, a memory infinitely disagreeable but

quite without the quality of remorse. I saw myself then as I see myself

now, driven step by step towards that hasty blow, the creature of a

sequence of accidents leading inevitably to that. I felt no

condemnation; yet the memory, static, unprogressive, haunted me. In the

silence of the night, with that sense of the nearness of God that

sometimes comes into the stillness and the darkness, I stood my trial,

my only trial, for that moment of wrath and fear. I retraced every step

of our conversation from the moment when I had found him crouching

beside me, heedless of my thirst, and pointing to the fire and smoke

that streamed up from the ruins of Weybridge. We had been incapable of

co-operation—grim chance had taken no heed of that. Had I foreseen, I

should have left him at Halliford. But I did not foresee; and crime is

to foresee and do. And I set this down as I have set all this story

down, as it was. There were no witnesses—all these things I might have

concealed. But I set it down, and the reader must form his judgment as

he will.

And when, by an effort, I had set aside that picture of a prostrate

body, I faced the problem of the Martians and the fate of my wife. For

the former I had no data; I could imagine a hundred things, and so,

unhappily, I could for the latter. And suddenly that night became

terrible. I found myself sitting up in bed, staring at the dark. I

found myself praying that the Heat-Ray might have suddenly and

painlessly struck her out of being. Since the night of my return from

Leatherhead I had not prayed. I had uttered prayers, fetish prayers,

had prayed as heathens mutter charms when I was in extremity; but now I

prayed indeed, pleading steadfastly and sanely, face to face with the

darkness of God. Strange night! Strangest in this, that so soon as dawn

had come, I, who had talked with God, crept out of the house like a rat

leaving its hiding place—a creature scarcely larger, an inferior

animal, a thing that for any passing whim of our masters might be

hunted and killed. Perhaps they also prayed confidently to God. Surely,

if we have learned nothing else, this war has taught us pity—pity for

those witless souls that suffer our dominion.

The morning was bright and fine, and the eastern sky glowed pink, and

was fretted with little golden clouds. In the road that runs from the

top of Putney Hill to Wimbledon was a number of poor vestiges of the

panic torrent that must have poured Londonward on the Sunday night

after the fighting began. There was a little two-wheeled cart inscribed

with the name of Thomas Lobb, Greengrocer, New Malden, with a smashed

wheel and an abandoned tin trunk; there was a straw hat trampled into

the now hardened mud, and at the top of West Hill a lot of

blood-stained glass about the overturned water trough. My movements

were languid, my plans of the vaguest. I had an idea of going to

Leatherhead, though I knew that there I had the poorest chance of

finding my wife. Certainly, unless death had overtaken them suddenly,

my cousins and she would have fled thence; but it seemed to me I might

find or learn there whither the Surrey people had fled. I knew I wanted

to find my wife, that my heart ached for her and the world of men, but

I had no clear idea how the finding might be done. I was also sharply

aware now of my intense loneliness. From the corner I went, under cover

of a thicket of trees and bushes, to the edge of Wimbledon Common,

stretching wide and far.

That dark expanse was lit in patches by yellow gorse and broom; there

was no red weed to be seen, and as I prowled, hesitating, on the verge

of the open, the sun rose, flooding it all with light and vitality. I

came upon a busy swarm of little frogs in a swampy place among the

trees. I stopped to look at them, drawing a lesson from their stout

resolve to live. And presently, turning suddenly, with an odd feeling

of being watched, I beheld something crouching amid a clump of bushes.

I stood regarding this. I made a step towards it, and it rose up and

became a man armed with a cutlass. I approached him slowly. He stood

silent and motionless, regarding me.

As I drew nearer I perceived he was dressed in clothes as dusty and

filthy as my own; he looked, indeed, as though he had been dragged

through a culvert. Nearer, I distinguished the green slime of ditches

mixing with the pale drab of dried clay and shiny, coaly patches. His

black hair fell over his eyes, and his face was dark and dirty and

sunken, so that at first I did not recognise him. There was a red cut

across the lower part of his face.

“Stop!” he cried, when I was within ten yards of him, and I stopped.

His voice was hoarse. “Where do you come from?” he said.

I thought, surveying him.

“I come from Mortlake,” I said. “I was buried near the pit the Martians

made about their cylinder. I have worked my way out and escaped.”

“There is no food about here,” he said. “This is my country. All this

hill down to the river, and back to Clapham, and up to the edge of the

common. There is only food for one. Which way are you going?”

I answered slowly.

“I don’t know,” I said. “I have been buried in the ruins of a house

thirteen or fourteen days. I don’t know what has happened.”

He looked at me doubtfully, then started, and looked with a changed

expression.

“I’ve no wish to stop about here,” said I. “I think I shall go to

Leatherhead, for my wife was there.”

He shot out a pointing finger.

“It is you,” said he; “the man from Woking. And you weren’t killed at

Weybridge?”

I recognised him at the same moment.

“You are the artilleryman who came into my garden.”

“Good luck!” he said. “We are lucky ones! Fancy \_you\_!” He put out a

hand, and I took it. “I crawled up a drain,” he said. “But they didn’t

kill everyone. And after they went away I got off towards Walton across

the fields. But—— It’s not sixteen days altogether—and your hair is

grey.” He looked over his shoulder suddenly. “Only a rook,” he said.

“One gets to know that birds have shadows these days. This is a bit

open. Let us crawl under those bushes and talk.”

“Have you seen any Martians?” I said. “Since I crawled out——”

“They’ve gone away across London,” he said. “I guess they’ve got a

bigger camp there. Of a night, all over there, Hampstead way, the sky

is alive with their lights. It’s like a great city, and in the glare

you can just see them moving. By daylight you can’t. But nearer—I

haven’t seen them—” (he counted on his fingers) “five days. Then I saw

a couple across Hammersmith way carrying something big. And the night

before last”—he stopped and spoke impressively—“it was just a matter of

lights, but it was something up in the air. I believe they’ve built a

flying-machine, and are learning to fly.”

I stopped, on hands and knees, for we had come to the bushes.

“Fly!”

“Yes,” he said, “fly.”

I went on into a little bower, and sat down.

“It is all over with humanity,” I said. “If they can do that they will

simply go round the world.”

He nodded.

“They will. But—— It will relieve things over here a bit. And

besides——” He looked at me. “Aren’t you satisfied it \_is\_ up with

humanity? I am. We’re down; we’re beat.”

I stared. Strange as it may seem, I had not arrived at this fact—a fact

perfectly obvious so soon as he spoke. I had still held a vague hope;

rather, I had kept a lifelong habit of mind. He repeated his words,

“We’re beat.” They carried absolute conviction.

“It’s all over,” he said. “They’ve lost \_one\_—just \_one\_. And they’ve

made their footing good and crippled the greatest power in the world.

They’ve walked over us. The death of that one at Weybridge was an

accident. And these are only pioneers. They kept on coming. These green

stars—I’ve seen none these five or six days, but I’ve no doubt they’re

falling somewhere every night. Nothing’s to be done. We’re under! We’re

beat!”

I made him no answer. I sat staring before me, trying in vain to devise

some countervailing thought.

“This isn’t a war,” said the artilleryman. “It never was a war, any

more than there’s war between man and ants.”

Suddenly I recalled the night in the observatory.

“After the tenth shot they fired no more—at least, until the first

cylinder came.”

“How do you know?” said the artilleryman. I explained. He thought.

“Something wrong with the gun,” he said. “But what if there is? They’ll

get it right again. And even if there’s a delay, how can it alter the

end? It’s just men and ants. There’s the ants builds their cities, live

their lives, have wars, revolutions, until the men want them out of the

way, and then they go out of the way. That’s what we are now—just ants.

Only——”

“Yes,” I said.

“We’re eatable ants.”

We sat looking at each other.

“And what will they do with us?” I said.

“That’s what I’ve been thinking,” he said; “that’s what I’ve been

thinking. After Weybridge I went south—thinking. I saw what was up.

Most of the people were hard at it squealing and exciting themselves.

But I’m not so fond of squealing. I’ve been in sight of death once or

twice; I’m not an ornamental soldier, and at the best and worst,

death—it’s just death. And it’s the man that keeps on thinking comes

through. I saw everyone tracking away south. Says I, ‘Food won’t last

this way,’ and I turned right back. I went for the Martians like a

sparrow goes for man. All round”—he waved a hand to the

horizon—“they’re starving in heaps, bolting, treading on each other. .

. .”

He saw my face, and halted awkwardly.

“No doubt lots who had money have gone away to France,” he said. He

seemed to hesitate whether to apologise, met my eyes, and went on:

“There’s food all about here. Canned things in shops; wines, spirits,

mineral waters; and the water mains and drains are empty. Well, I was

telling you what I was thinking. ‘Here’s intelligent things,’ I said,

‘and it seems they want us for food. First, they’ll smash us up—ships,

machines, guns, cities, all the order and organisation. All that will

go. If we were the size of ants we might pull through. But we’re not.

It’s all too bulky to stop. That’s the first certainty.’ Eh?”

I assented.

“It is; I’ve thought it out. Very well, then—next; at present we’re

caught as we’re wanted. A Martian has only to go a few miles to get a

crowd on the run. And I saw one, one day, out by Wandsworth, picking

houses to pieces and routing among the wreckage. But they won’t keep on

doing that. So soon as they’ve settled all our guns and ships, and

smashed our railways, and done all the things they are doing over

there, they will begin catching us systematic, picking the best and

storing us in cages and things. That’s what they will start doing in a

bit. Lord! They haven’t begun on us yet. Don’t you see that?”

“Not begun!” I exclaimed.

“Not begun. All that’s happened so far is through our not having the

sense to keep quiet—worrying them with guns and such foolery. And

losing our heads, and rushing off in crowds to where there wasn’t any

more safety than where we were. They don’t want to bother us yet.

They’re making their things—making all the things they couldn’t bring

with them, getting things ready for the rest of their people. Very

likely that’s why the cylinders have stopped for a bit, for fear of

hitting those who are here. And instead of our rushing about blind, on

the howl, or getting dynamite on the chance of busting them up, we’ve

got to fix ourselves up according to the new state of affairs. That’s

how I figure it out. It isn’t quite according to what a man wants for

his species, but it’s about what the facts point to. And that’s the

principle I acted upon. Cities, nations, civilisation, progress—it’s

all over. That game’s up. We’re beat.”

“But if that is so, what is there to live for?”

The artilleryman looked at me for a moment.

“There won’t be any more blessed concerts for a million years or so;

there won’t be any Royal Academy of Arts, and no nice little feeds at

restaurants. If it’s amusement you’re after, I reckon the game is up.

If you’ve got any drawing-room manners or a dislike to eating peas with

a knife or dropping aitches, you’d better chuck ’em away. They ain’t no

further use.”

“You mean——”

“I mean that men like me are going on living—for the sake of the breed.

I tell you, I’m grim set on living. And if I’m not mistaken, you’ll

show what insides \_you’ve\_ got, too, before long. We aren’t going to be

exterminated. And I don’t mean to be caught either, and tamed and

fattened and bred like a thundering ox. Ugh! Fancy those brown

creepers!”

“You don’t mean to say——”

“I do. I’m going on, under their feet. I’ve got it planned; I’ve

thought it out. We men are beat. We don’t know enough. We’ve got to

learn before we’ve got a chance. And we’ve got to live and keep

independent while we learn. See! That’s what has to be done.”

I stared, astonished, and stirred profoundly by the man’s resolution.

“Great God!” cried I. “But you are a man indeed!” And suddenly I

gripped his hand.

“Eh!” he said, with his eyes shining. “I’ve thought it out, eh?”

“Go on,” I said.

“Well, those who mean to escape their catching must get ready. I’m

getting ready. Mind you, it isn’t all of us that are made for wild

beasts; and that’s what it’s got to be. That’s why I watched you. I had

my doubts. You’re slender. I didn’t know that it was you, you see, or

just how you’d been buried. All these—the sort of people that lived in

these houses, and all those damn little clerks that used to live down

\_that\_ way—they’d be no good. They haven’t any spirit in them—no proud

dreams and no proud lusts; and a man who hasn’t one or the other—Lord!

What is he but funk and precautions? They just used to skedaddle off to

work—I’ve seen hundreds of ’em, bit of breakfast in hand, running wild

and shining to catch their little season-ticket train, for fear they’d

get dismissed if they didn’t; working at businesses they were afraid to

take the trouble to understand; skedaddling back for fear they wouldn’t

be in time for dinner; keeping indoors after dinner for fear of the

back streets, and sleeping with the wives they married, not because

they wanted them, but because they had a bit of money that would make

for safety in their one little miserable skedaddle through the world.

Lives insured and a bit invested for fear of accidents. And on

Sundays—fear of the hereafter. As if hell was built for rabbits! Well,

the Martians will just be a godsend to these. Nice roomy cages,

fattening food, careful breeding, no worry. After a week or so chasing

about the fields and lands on empty stomachs, they’ll come and be

caught cheerful. They’ll be quite glad after a bit. They’ll wonder what

people did before there were Martians to take care of them. And the bar

loafers, and mashers, and singers—I can imagine them. I can imagine

them,” he said, with a sort of sombre gratification. “There’ll be any

amount of sentiment and religion loose among them. There’s hundreds of

things I saw with my eyes that I’ve only begun to see clearly these

last few days. There’s lots will take things as they are—fat and

stupid; and lots will be worried by a sort of feeling that it’s all

wrong, and that they ought to be doing something. Now whenever things

are so that a lot of people feel they ought to be doing something, the

weak, and those who go weak with a lot of complicated thinking, always

make for a sort of do-nothing religion, very pious and superior, and

submit to persecution and the will of the Lord. Very likely you’ve seen

the same thing. It’s energy in a gale of funk, and turned clean inside

out. These cages will be full of psalms and hymns and piety. And those

of a less simple sort will work in a bit of—what is it?—eroticism.”

He paused.

“Very likely these Martians will make pets of some of them; train them

to do tricks—who knows?—get sentimental over the pet boy who grew up

and had to be killed. And some, maybe, they will train to hunt us.”

“No,” I cried, “that’s impossible! No human being——”

“What’s the good of going on with such lies?” said the artilleryman.

“There’s men who’d do it cheerful. What nonsense to pretend there

isn’t!”

And I succumbed to his conviction.

“If they come after me,” he said; “Lord, if they come after me!” and

subsided into a grim meditation.

I sat contemplating these things. I could find nothing to bring against

this man’s reasoning. In the days before the invasion no one would have

questioned my intellectual superiority to his—I, a professed and

recognised writer on philosophical themes, and he, a common soldier;

and yet he had already formulated a situation that I had scarcely

realised.

“What are you doing?” I said presently. “What plans have you made?”

He hesitated.

“Well, it’s like this,” he said. “What have we to do? We have to invent

a sort of life where men can live and breed, and be sufficiently secure

to bring the children up. Yes—wait a bit, and I’ll make it clearer what

I think ought to be done. The tame ones will go like all tame beasts;

in a few generations they’ll be big, beautiful, rich-blooded,

stupid—rubbish! The risk is that we who keep wild will go

savage—degenerate into a sort of big, savage rat. . . . You see, how I

mean to live is underground. I’ve been thinking about the drains. Of

course those who don’t know drains think horrible things; but under

this London are miles and miles—hundreds of miles—and a few days rain

and London empty will leave them sweet and clean. The main drains are

big enough and airy enough for anyone. Then there’s cellars, vaults,

stores, from which bolting passages may be made to the drains. And the

railway tunnels and subways. Eh? You begin to see? And we form a

band—able-bodied, clean-minded men. We’re not going to pick up any

rubbish that drifts in. Weaklings go out again.”

“As you meant me to go?”

“Well—I parleyed, didn’t I?”

“We won’t quarrel about that. Go on.”

“Those who stop obey orders. Able-bodied, clean-minded women we want

also—mothers and teachers. No lackadaisical ladies—no blasted rolling

eyes. We can’t have any weak or silly. Life is real again, and the

useless and cumbersome and mischievous have to die. They ought to die.

They ought to be willing to die. It’s a sort of disloyalty, after all,

to live and taint the race. And they can’t be happy. Moreover, dying’s

none so dreadful; it’s the funking makes it bad. And in all those

places we shall gather. Our district will be London. And we may even be

able to keep a watch, and run about in the open when the Martians keep

away. Play cricket, perhaps. That’s how we shall save the race. Eh?

It’s a possible thing? But saving the race is nothing in itself. As I

say, that’s only being rats. It’s saving our knowledge and adding to it

is the thing. There men like you come in. There’s books, there’s

models. We must make great safe places down deep, and get all the books

we can; not novels and poetry swipes, but ideas, science books. That’s

where men like you come in. We must go to the British Museum and pick

all those books through. Especially we must keep up our science—learn

more. We must watch these Martians. Some of us must go as spies. When

it’s all working, perhaps I will. Get caught, I mean. And the great

thing is, we must leave the Martians alone. We mustn’t even steal. If

we get in their way, we clear out. We must show them we mean no harm.

Yes, I know. But they’re intelligent things, and they won’t hunt us

down if they have all they want, and think we’re just harmless vermin.”

The artilleryman paused and laid a brown hand upon my arm.

“After all, it may not be so much we may have to learn before—Just

imagine this: four or five of their fighting machines suddenly starting

off—Heat-Rays right and left, and not a Martian in ’em. Not a Martian

in ’em, but men—men who have learned the way how. It may be in my time,

even—those men. Fancy having one of them lovely things, with its

Heat-Ray wide and free! Fancy having it in control! What would it

matter if you smashed to smithereens at the end of the run, after a

bust like that? I reckon the Martians’ll open their beautiful eyes!

Can’t you see them, man? Can’t you see them hurrying, hurrying—puffing

and blowing and hooting to their other mechanical affairs? Something

out of gear in every case. And swish, bang, rattle, swish! Just as they

are fumbling over it, \_swish\_ comes the Heat-Ray, and, behold! man has

come back to his own.”

For a while the imaginative daring of the artilleryman, and the tone of

assurance and courage he assumed, completely dominated my mind. I

believed unhesitatingly both in his forecast of human destiny and in

the practicability of his astonishing scheme, and the reader who thinks

me susceptible and foolish must contrast his position, reading steadily

with all his thoughts about his subject, and mine, crouching fearfully

in the bushes and listening, distracted by apprehension. We talked in

this manner through the early morning time, and later crept out of the

bushes, and, after scanning the sky for Martians, hurried precipitately

to the house on Putney Hill where he had made his lair. It was the coal

cellar of the place, and when I saw the work he had spent a week

upon—it was a burrow scarcely ten yards long, which he designed to

reach to the main drain on Putney Hill—I had my first inkling of the

gulf between his dreams and his powers. Such a hole I could have dug in

a day. But I believed in him sufficiently to work with him all that

morning until past midday at his digging. We had a garden barrow and

shot the earth we removed against the kitchen range. We refreshed

ourselves with a tin of mock-turtle soup and wine from the neighbouring

pantry. I found a curious relief from the aching strangeness of the

world in this steady labour. As we worked, I turned his project over in

my mind, and presently objections and doubts began to arise; but I

worked there all the morning, so glad was I to find myself with a

purpose again. After working an hour I began to speculate on the

distance one had to go before the cloaca was reached, the chances we

had of missing it altogether. My immediate trouble was why we should

dig this long tunnel, when it was possible to get into the drain at

once down one of the manholes, and work back to the house. It seemed to

me, too, that the house was inconveniently chosen, and required a

needless length of tunnel. And just as I was beginning to face these

things, the artilleryman stopped digging, and looked at me.

“We’re working well,” he said. He put down his spade. “Let us knock off

a bit” he said. “I think it’s time we reconnoitred from the roof of the

house.”

I was for going on, and after a little hesitation he resumed his spade;

and then suddenly I was struck by a thought. I stopped, and so did he

at once.

“Why were you walking about the common,” I said, “instead of being

here?”

“Taking the air,” he said. “I was coming back. It’s safer by night.”

“But the work?”

“Oh, one can’t always work,” he said, and in a flash I saw the man

plain. He hesitated, holding his spade. “We ought to reconnoitre now,”

he said, “because if any come near they may hear the spades and drop

upon us unawares.”

I was no longer disposed to object. We went together to the roof and

stood on a ladder peeping out of the roof door. No Martians were to be

seen, and we ventured out on the tiles, and slipped down under shelter

of the parapet.

From this position a shrubbery hid the greater portion of Putney, but

we could see the river below, a bubbly mass of red weed, and the low

parts of Lambeth flooded and red. The red creeper swarmed up the trees

about the old palace, and their branches stretched gaunt and dead, and

set with shrivelled leaves, from amid its clusters. It was strange how

entirely dependent both these things were upon flowing water for their

propagation. About us neither had gained a footing; laburnums, pink

mays, snowballs, and trees of arbor-vitae, rose out of laurels and

hydrangeas, green and brilliant into the sunlight. Beyond Kensington

dense smoke was rising, and that and a blue haze hid the northward

hills.

The artilleryman began to tell me of the sort of people who still

remained in London.

“One night last week,” he said, “some fools got the electric light in

order, and there was all Regent Street and the Circus ablaze, crowded

with painted and ragged drunkards, men and women, dancing and shouting

till dawn. A man who was there told me. And as the day came they became

aware of a fighting-machine standing near by the Langham and looking

down at them. Heaven knows how long he had been there. It must have

given some of them a nasty turn. He came down the road towards them,

and picked up nearly a hundred too drunk or frightened to run away.”

Grotesque gleam of a time no history will ever fully describe!

From that, in answer to my questions, he came round to his grandiose

plans again. He grew enthusiastic. He talked so eloquently of the

possibility of capturing a fighting-machine that I more than half

believed in him again. But now that I was beginning to understand

something of his quality, I could divine the stress he laid on doing

nothing precipitately. And I noted that now there was no question that

he personally was to capture and fight the great machine.

After a time we went down to the cellar. Neither of us seemed disposed

to resume digging, and when he suggested a meal, I was nothing loath.

He became suddenly very generous, and when we had eaten he went away

and returned with some excellent cigars. We lit these, and his optimism

glowed. He was inclined to regard my coming as a great occasion.

“There’s some champagne in the cellar,” he said.

“We can dig better on this Thames-side burgundy,” said I.

“No,” said he; “I am host today. Champagne! Great God! We’ve a heavy

enough task before us! Let us take a rest and gather strength while we

may. Look at these blistered hands!”

And pursuant to this idea of a holiday, he insisted upon playing cards

after we had eaten. He taught me euchre, and after dividing London

between us, I taking the northern side and he the southern, we played

for parish points. Grotesque and foolish as this will seem to the sober

reader, it is absolutely true, and what is more remarkable, I found the

card game and several others we played extremely interesting.

Strange mind of man! that, with our species upon the edge of

extermination or appalling degradation, with no clear prospect before

us but the chance of a horrible death, we could sit following the

chance of this painted pasteboard, and playing the “joker” with vivid

delight. Afterwards he taught me poker, and I beat him at three tough

chess games. When dark came we decided to take the risk, and lit a

lamp.

After an interminable string of games, we supped, and the artilleryman

finished the champagne. We went on smoking the cigars. He was no longer

the energetic regenerator of his species I had encountered in the

morning. He was still optimistic, but it was a less kinetic, a more

thoughtful optimism. I remember he wound up with my health, proposed in

a speech of small variety and considerable intermittence. I took a

cigar, and went upstairs to look at the lights of which he had spoken

that blazed so greenly along the Highgate hills.

At first I stared unintelligently across the London valley. The

northern hills were shrouded in darkness; the fires near Kensington

glowed redly, and now and then an orange-red tongue of flame flashed up

and vanished in the deep blue night. All the rest of London was black.

Then, nearer, I perceived a strange light, a pale, violet-purple

fluorescent glow, quivering under the night breeze. For a space I could

not understand it, and then I knew that it must be the red weed from

which this faint irradiation proceeded. With that realisation my

dormant sense of wonder, my sense of the proportion of things, awoke

again. I glanced from that to Mars, red and clear, glowing high in the

west, and then gazed long and earnestly at the darkness of Hampstead

and Highgate.

I remained a very long time upon the roof, wondering at the grotesque

changes of the day. I recalled my mental states from the midnight

prayer to the foolish card-playing. I had a violent revulsion of

feeling. I remember I flung away the cigar with a certain wasteful

symbolism. My folly came to me with glaring exaggeration. I seemed a

traitor to my wife and to my kind; I was filled with remorse. I

resolved to leave this strange undisciplined dreamer of great things to

his drink and gluttony, and to go on into London. There, it seemed to

me, I had the best chance of learning what the Martians and my

fellowmen were doing. I was still upon the roof when the late moon

rose.

VIII.

DEAD LONDON.

After I had parted from the artilleryman, I went down the hill, and by

the High Street across the bridge to Fulham. The red weed was

tumultuous at that time, and nearly choked the bridge roadway; but its

fronds were already whitened in patches by the spreading disease that

presently removed it so swiftly.

At the corner of the lane that runs to Putney Bridge station I found a

man lying. He was as black as a sweep with the black dust, alive, but

helplessly and speechlessly drunk. I could get nothing from him but

curses and furious lunges at my head. I think I should have stayed by

him but for the brutal expression of his face.

There was black dust along the roadway from the bridge onwards, and it

grew thicker in Fulham. The streets were horribly quiet. I got

food—sour, hard, and mouldy, but quite eatable—in a baker’s shop here.

Some way towards Walham Green the streets became clear of powder, and I

passed a white terrace of houses on fire; the noise of the burning was

an absolute relief. Going on towards Brompton, the streets were quiet

again.

Here I came once more upon the black powder in the streets and upon

dead bodies. I saw altogether about a dozen in the length of the Fulham

Road. They had been dead many days, so that I hurried quickly past

them. The black powder covered them over, and softened their outlines.

One or two had been disturbed by dogs.

Where there was no black powder, it was curiously like a Sunday in the

City, with the closed shops, the houses locked up and the blinds drawn,

the desertion, and the stillness. In some places plunderers had been at

work, but rarely at other than the provision and wine shops. A

jeweller’s window had been broken open in one place, but apparently the

thief had been disturbed, and a number of gold chains and a watch lay

scattered on the pavement. I did not trouble to touch them. Farther on

was a tattered woman in a heap on a doorstep; the hand that hung over

her knee was gashed and bled down her rusty brown dress, and a smashed

magnum of champagne formed a pool across the pavement. She seemed

asleep, but she was dead.

The farther I penetrated into London, the profounder grew the

stillness. But it was not so much the stillness of death—it was the

stillness of suspense, of expectation. At any time the destruction that

had already singed the northwestern borders of the metropolis, and had

annihilated Ealing and Kilburn, might strike among these houses and

leave them smoking ruins. It was a city condemned and derelict. . . .

In South Kensington the streets were clear of dead and of black powder.

It was near South Kensington that I first heard the howling. It crept

almost imperceptibly upon my senses. It was a sobbing alternation of

two notes, “Ulla, ulla, ulla, ulla,” keeping on perpetually. When I

passed streets that ran northward it grew in volume, and houses and

buildings seemed to deaden and cut it off again. It came in a full tide

down Exhibition Road. I stopped, staring towards Kensington Gardens,

wondering at this strange, remote wailing. It was as if that mighty

desert of houses had found a voice for its fear and solitude.

“Ulla, ulla, ulla, ulla,” wailed that superhuman note—great waves of

sound sweeping down the broad, sunlit roadway, between the tall

buildings on each side. I turned northwards, marvelling, towards the

iron gates of Hyde Park. I had half a mind to break into the Natural

History Museum and find my way up to the summits of the towers, in

order to see across the park. But I decided to keep to the ground,

where quick hiding was possible, and so went on up the Exhibition Road.

All the large mansions on each side of the road were empty and still,

and my footsteps echoed against the sides of the houses. At the top,

near the park gate, I came upon a strange sight—a bus overturned, and

the skeleton of a horse picked clean. I puzzled over this for a time,

and then went on to the bridge over the Serpentine. The voice grew

stronger and stronger, though I could see nothing above the housetops

on the north side of the park, save a haze of smoke to the northwest.

“Ulla, ulla, ulla, ulla,” cried the voice, coming, as it seemed to me,

from the district about Regent’s Park. The desolating cry worked upon

my mind. The mood that had sustained me passed. The wailing took

possession of me. I found I was intensely weary, footsore, and now

again hungry and thirsty.

It was already past noon. Why was I wandering alone in this city of the

dead? Why was I alone when all London was lying in state, and in its

black shroud? I felt intolerably lonely. My mind ran on old friends

that I had forgotten for years. I thought of the poisons in the

chemists’ shops, of the liquors the wine merchants stored; I recalled

the two sodden creatures of despair, who so far as I knew, shared the

city with myself. . . .

I came into Oxford Street by the Marble Arch, and here again were black

powder and several bodies, and an evil, ominous smell from the gratings

of the cellars of some of the houses. I grew very thirsty after the

heat of my long walk. With infinite trouble I managed to break into a

public-house and get food and drink. I was weary after eating, and went

into the parlour behind the bar, and slept on a black horsehair sofa I

found there.

I awoke to find that dismal howling still in my ears, “Ulla, ulla,

ulla, ulla.” It was now dusk, and after I had routed out some biscuits

and a cheese in the bar—there was a meat safe, but it contained nothing

but maggots—I wandered on through the silent residential squares to

Baker Street—Portman Square is the only one I can name—and so came out

at last upon Regent’s Park. And as I emerged from the top of Baker

Street, I saw far away over the trees in the clearness of the sunset

the hood of the Martian giant from which this howling proceeded. I was

not terrified. I came upon him as if it were a matter of course. I

watched him for some time, but he did not move. He appeared to be

standing and yelling, for no reason that I could discover.

I tried to formulate a plan of action. That perpetual sound of “Ulla,

ulla, ulla, ulla,” confused my mind. Perhaps I was too tired to be very

fearful. Certainly I was more curious to know the reason of this

monotonous crying than afraid. I turned back away from the park and

struck into Park Road, intending to skirt the park, went along under

the shelter of the terraces, and got a view of this stationary, howling

Martian from the direction of St. John’s Wood. A couple of hundred

yards out of Baker Street I heard a yelping chorus, and saw, first a

dog with a piece of putrescent red meat in his jaws coming headlong

towards me, and then a pack of starving mongrels in pursuit of him. He

made a wide curve to avoid me, as though he feared I might prove a

fresh competitor. As the yelping died away down the silent road, the

wailing sound of “Ulla, ulla, ulla, ulla,” reasserted itself.

I came upon the wrecked handling-machine halfway to St. John’s Wood

station. At first I thought a house had fallen across the road. It was

only as I clambered among the ruins that I saw, with a start, this

mechanical Samson lying, with its tentacles bent and smashed and

twisted, among the ruins it had made. The forepart was shattered. It

seemed as if it had driven blindly straight at the house, and had been

overwhelmed in its overthrow. It seemed to me then that this might have

happened by a handling-machine escaping from the guidance of its

Martian. I could not clamber among the ruins to see it, and the

twilight was now so far advanced that the blood with which its seat was

smeared, and the gnawed gristle of the Martian that the dogs had left,

were invisible to me.

Wondering still more at all that I had seen, I pushed on towards

Primrose Hill. Far away, through a gap in the trees, I saw a second

Martian, as motionless as the first, standing in the park towards the

Zoological Gardens, and silent. A little beyond the ruins about the

smashed handling-machine I came upon the red weed again, and found the

Regent’s Canal, a spongy mass of dark-red vegetation.

As I crossed the bridge, the sound of “Ulla, ulla, ulla, ulla,” ceased.

It was, as it were, cut off. The silence came like a thunderclap.

The dusky houses about me stood faint and tall and dim; the trees

towards the park were growing black. All about me the red weed

clambered among the ruins, writhing to get above me in the dimness.

Night, the mother of fear and mystery, was coming upon me. But while

that voice sounded the solitude, the desolation, had been endurable; by

virtue of it London had still seemed alive, and the sense of life about

me had upheld me. Then suddenly a change, the passing of something—I

knew not what—and then a stillness that could be felt. Nothing but this

gaunt quiet.

London about me gazed at me spectrally. The windows in the white houses

were like the eye sockets of skulls. About me my imagination found a

thousand noiseless enemies moving. Terror seized me, a horror of my

temerity. In front of me the road became pitchy black as though it was

tarred, and I saw a contorted shape lying across the pathway. I could

not bring myself to go on. I turned down St. John’s Wood Road, and ran

headlong from this unendurable stillness towards Kilburn. I hid from

the night and the silence, until long after midnight, in a cabmen’s

shelter in Harrow Road. But before the dawn my courage returned, and

while the stars were still in the sky I turned once more towards

Regent’s Park. I missed my way among the streets, and presently saw

down a long avenue, in the half-light of the early dawn, the curve of

Primrose Hill. On the summit, towering up to the fading stars, was a

third Martian, erect and motionless like the others.

An insane resolve possessed me. I would die and end it. And I would

save myself even the trouble of killing myself. I marched on recklessly

towards this Titan, and then, as I drew nearer and the light grew, I

saw that a multitude of black birds was circling and clustering about

the hood. At that my heart gave a bound, and I began running along the

road.

I hurried through the red weed that choked St. Edmund’s Terrace (I

waded breast-high across a torrent of water that was rushing down from

the waterworks towards the Albert Road), and emerged upon the grass

before the rising of the sun. Great mounds had been heaped about the

crest of the hill, making a huge redoubt of it—it was the final and

largest place the Martians had made—and from behind these heaps there

rose a thin smoke against the sky. Against the sky line an eager dog

ran and disappeared. The thought that had flashed into my mind grew

real, grew credible. I felt no fear, only a wild, trembling exultation,

as I ran up the hill towards the motionless monster. Out of the hood

hung lank shreds of brown, at which the hungry birds pecked and tore.

In another moment I had scrambled up the earthen rampart and stood upon

its crest, and the interior of the redoubt was below me. A mighty space

it was, with gigantic machines here and there within it, huge mounds of

material and strange shelter places. And scattered about it, some in

their overturned war-machines, some in the now rigid handling-machines,

and a dozen of them stark and silent and laid in a row, were the

Martians—\_dead\_!—slain by the putrefactive and disease bacteria against

which their systems were unprepared; slain as the red weed was being

slain; slain, after all man’s devices had failed, by the humblest

things that God, in his wisdom, has put upon this earth.

For so it had come about, as indeed I and many men might have foreseen

had not terror and disaster blinded our minds. These germs of disease

have taken toll of humanity since the beginning of things—taken toll of

our prehuman ancestors since life began here. But by virtue of this

natural selection of our kind we have developed resisting power; to no

germs do we succumb without a struggle, and to many—those that cause

putrefaction in dead matter, for instance—our living frames are

altogether immune. But there are no bacteria in Mars, and directly

these invaders arrived, directly they drank and fed, our microscopic

allies began to work their overthrow. Already when I watched them they

were irrevocably doomed, dying and rotting even as they went to and

fro. It was inevitable. By the toll of a billion deaths man has bought

his birthright of the earth, and it is his against all comers; it would

still be his were the Martians ten times as mighty as they are. For

neither do men live nor die in vain.

Here and there they were scattered, nearly fifty altogether, in that

great gulf they had made, overtaken by a death that must have seemed to

them as incomprehensible as any death could be. To me also at that time

this death was incomprehensible. All I knew was that these things that

had been alive and so terrible to men were dead. For a moment I

believed that the destruction of Sennacherib had been repeated, that

God had repented, that the Angel of Death had slain them in the night.

I stood staring into the pit, and my heart lightened gloriously, even

as the rising sun struck the world to fire about me with his rays. The

pit was still in darkness; the mighty engines, so great and wonderful

in their power and complexity, so unearthly in their tortuous forms,

rose weird and vague and strange out of the shadows towards the light.

A multitude of dogs, I could hear, fought over the bodies that lay

darkly in the depth of the pit, far below me. Across the pit on its

farther lip, flat and vast and strange, lay the great flying-machine

with which they had been experimenting upon our denser atmosphere when

decay and death arrested them. Death had come not a day too soon. At

the sound of a cawing overhead I looked up at the huge fighting-machine

that would fight no more for ever, at the tattered red shreds of flesh

that dripped down upon the overturned seats on the summit of Primrose

Hill.

I turned and looked down the slope of the hill to where, enhaloed now

in birds, stood those other two Martians that I had seen overnight,

just as death had overtaken them. The one had died, even as it had been

crying to its companions; perhaps it was the last to die, and its voice

had gone on perpetually until the force of its machinery was exhausted.

They glittered now, harmless tripod towers of shining metal, in the

brightness of the rising sun.

All about the pit, and saved as by a miracle from everlasting

destruction, stretched the great Mother of Cities. Those who have only

seen London veiled in her sombre robes of smoke can scarcely imagine

the naked clearness and beauty of the silent wilderness of houses.

Eastward, over the blackened ruins of the Albert Terrace and the

splintered spire of the church, the sun blazed dazzling in a clear sky,

and here and there some facet in the great wilderness of roofs caught

the light and glared with a white intensity.

Northward were Kilburn and Hampsted, blue and crowded with houses;

westward the great city was dimmed; and southward, beyond the Martians,

the green waves of Regent’s Park, the Langham Hotel, the dome of the

Albert Hall, the Imperial Institute, and the giant mansions of the

Brompton Road came out clear and little in the sunrise, the jagged

ruins of Westminster rising hazily beyond. Far away and blue were the

Surrey hills, and the towers of the Crystal Palace glittered like two

silver rods. The dome of St. Paul’s was dark against the sunrise, and

injured, I saw for the first time, by a huge gaping cavity on its

western side.

And as I looked at this wide expanse of houses and factories and

churches, silent and abandoned; as I thought of the multitudinous hopes

and efforts, the innumerable hosts of lives that had gone to build this

human reef, and of the swift and ruthless destruction that had hung

over it all; when I realised that the shadow had been rolled back, and

that men might still live in the streets, and this dear vast dead city

of mine be once more alive and powerful, I felt a wave of emotion that

was near akin to tears.

The torment was over. Even that day the healing would begin. The

survivors of the people scattered over the country—leaderless, lawless,

foodless, like sheep without a shepherd—the thousands who had fled by

sea, would begin to return; the pulse of life, growing stronger and

stronger, would beat again in the empty streets and pour across the

vacant squares. Whatever destruction was done, the hand of the

destroyer was stayed. All the gaunt wrecks, the blackened skeletons of

houses that stared so dismally at the sunlit grass of the hill, would

presently be echoing with the hammers of the restorers and ringing with

the tapping of their trowels. At the thought I extended my hands

towards the sky and began thanking God. In a year, thought I—in a year.

. . .

With overwhelming force came the thought of myself, of my wife, and the

old life of hope and tender helpfulness that had ceased for ever.

IX.

WRECKAGE.

And now comes the strangest thing in my story. Yet, perhaps, it is not

altogether strange. I remember, clearly and coldly and vividly, all

that I did that day until the time that I stood weeping and praising

God upon the summit of Primrose Hill. And then I forget.

Of the next three days I know nothing. I have learned since that, so

far from my being the first discoverer of the Martian overthrow,

several such wanderers as myself had already discovered this on the

previous night. One man—the first—had gone to St. Martin’s-le-Grand,

and, while I sheltered in the cabmen’s hut, had contrived to telegraph

to Paris. Thence the joyful news had flashed all over the world; a

thousand cities, chilled by ghastly apprehensions, suddenly flashed

into frantic illuminations; they knew of it in Dublin, Edinburgh,

Manchester, Birmingham, at the time when I stood upon the verge of the

pit. Already men, weeping with joy, as I have heard, shouting and

staying their work to shake hands and shout, were making up trains,

even as near as Crewe, to descend upon London. The church bells that

had ceased a fortnight since suddenly caught the news, until all

England was bell-ringing. Men on cycles, lean-faced, unkempt, scorched

along every country lane shouting of unhoped deliverance, shouting to

gaunt, staring figures of despair. And for the food! Across the

Channel, across the Irish Sea, across the Atlantic, corn, bread, and

meat were tearing to our relief. All the shipping in the world seemed

going Londonward in those days. But of all this I have no memory. I

drifted—a demented man. I found myself in a house of kindly people, who

had found me on the third day wandering, weeping, and raving through

the streets of St. John’s Wood. They have told me since that I was

singing some insane doggerel about “The Last Man Left Alive! Hurrah!

The Last Man Left Alive!” Troubled as they were with their own affairs,

these people, whose name, much as I would like to express my gratitude

to them, I may not even give here, nevertheless cumbered themselves

with me, sheltered me, and protected me from myself. Apparently they

had learned something of my story from me during the days of my lapse.

Very gently, when my mind was assured again, did they break to me what

they had learned of the fate of Leatherhead. Two days after I was

imprisoned it had been destroyed, with every soul in it, by a Martian.

He had swept it out of existence, as it seemed, without any

provocation, as a boy might crush an ant hill, in the mere wantonness

of power.

I was a lonely man, and they were very kind to me. I was a lonely man

and a sad one, and they bore with me. I remained with them four days

after my recovery. All that time I felt a vague, a growing craving to

look once more on whatever remained of the little life that seemed so

happy and bright in my past. It was a mere hopeless desire to feast

upon my misery. They dissuaded me. They did all they could to divert me

from this morbidity. But at last I could resist the impulse no longer,

and, promising faithfully to return to them, and parting, as I will

confess, from these four-day friends with tears, I went out again into

the streets that had lately been so dark and strange and empty.

Already they were busy with returning people; in places even there were

shops open, and I saw a drinking fountain running water.

I remember how mockingly bright the day seemed as I went back on my

melancholy pilgrimage to the little house at Woking, how busy the

streets and vivid the moving life about me. So many people were abroad

everywhere, busied in a thousand activities, that it seemed incredible

that any great proportion of the population could have been slain. But

then I noticed how yellow were the skins of the people I met, how

shaggy the hair of the men, how large and bright their eyes, and that

every other man still wore his dirty rags. Their faces seemed all with

one of two expressions—a leaping exultation and energy or a grim

resolution. Save for the expression of the faces, London seemed a city

of tramps. The vestries were indiscriminately distributing bread sent

us by the French government. The ribs of the few horses showed

dismally. Haggard special constables with white badges stood at the

corners of every street. I saw little of the mischief wrought by the

Martians until I reached Wellington Street, and there I saw the red

weed clambering over the buttresses of Waterloo Bridge.

At the corner of the bridge, too, I saw one of the common contrasts of

that grotesque time—a sheet of paper flaunting against a thicket of the

red weed, transfixed by a stick that kept it in place. It was the

placard of the first newspaper to resume publication—the \_Daily Mail\_.

I bought a copy for a blackened shilling I found in my pocket. Most of

it was in blank, but the solitary compositor who did the thing had

amused himself by making a grotesque scheme of advertisement stereo on

the back page. The matter he printed was emotional; the news

organisation had not as yet found its way back. I learned nothing fresh

except that already in one week the examination of the Martian

mechanisms had yielded astonishing results. Among other things, the

article assured me what I did not believe at the time, that the “Secret

of Flying,” was discovered. At Waterloo I found the free trains that

were taking people to their homes. The first rush was already over.

There were few people in the train, and I was in no mood for casual

conversation. I got a compartment to myself, and sat with folded arms,

looking greyly at the sunlit devastation that flowed past the windows.

And just outside the terminus the train jolted over temporary rails,

and on either side of the railway the houses were blackened ruins. To

Clapham Junction the face of London was grimy with powder of the Black

Smoke, in spite of two days of thunderstorms and rain, and at Clapham

Junction the line had been wrecked again; there were hundreds of

out-of-work clerks and shopmen working side by side with the customary

navvies, and we were jolted over a hasty relaying.

All down the line from there the aspect of the country was gaunt and

unfamiliar; Wimbledon particularly had suffered. Walton, by virtue of

its unburned pine woods, seemed the least hurt of any place along the

line. The Wandle, the Mole, every little stream, was a heaped mass of

red weed, in appearance between butcher’s meat and pickled cabbage. The

Surrey pine woods were too dry, however, for the festoons of the red

climber. Beyond Wimbledon, within sight of the line, in certain nursery

grounds, were the heaped masses of earth about the sixth cylinder. A

number of people were standing about it, and some sappers were busy in

the midst of it. Over it flaunted a Union Jack, flapping cheerfully in

the morning breeze. The nursery grounds were everywhere crimson with

the weed, a wide expanse of livid colour cut with purple shadows, and

very painful to the eye. One’s gaze went with infinite relief from the

scorched greys and sullen reds of the foreground to the blue-green

softness of the eastward hills.

The line on the London side of Woking station was still undergoing

repair, so I descended at Byfleet station and took the road to Maybury,

past the place where I and the artilleryman had talked to the hussars,

and on by the spot where the Martian had appeared to me in the

thunderstorm. Here, moved by curiosity, I turned aside to find, among a

tangle of red fronds, the warped and broken dog cart with the whitened

bones of the horse scattered and gnawed. For a time I stood regarding

these vestiges. . . .

Then I returned through the pine wood, neck-high with red weed here and

there, to find the landlord of the Spotted Dog had already found

burial, and so came home past the College Arms. A man standing at an

open cottage door greeted me by name as I passed.

I looked at my house with a quick flash of hope that faded immediately.

The door had been forced; it was unfast and was opening slowly as I

approached.

It slammed again. The curtains of my study fluttered out of the open

window from which I and the artilleryman had watched the dawn. No one

had closed it since. The smashed bushes were just as I had left them

nearly four weeks ago. I stumbled into the hall, and the house felt

empty. The stair carpet was ruffled and discoloured where I had

crouched, soaked to the skin from the thunderstorm the night of the

catastrophe. Our muddy footsteps I saw still went up the stairs.

I followed them to my study, and found lying on my writing-table still,

with the selenite paper weight upon it, the sheet of work I had left on

the afternoon of the opening of the cylinder. For a space I stood

reading over my abandoned arguments. It was a paper on the probable

development of Moral Ideas with the development of the civilising

process; and the last sentence was the opening of a prophecy: “In about

two hundred years,” I had written, “we may expect——” The sentence ended

abruptly. I remembered my inability to fix my mind that morning,

scarcely a month gone by, and how I had broken off to get my \_Daily

Chronicle\_ from the newsboy. I remembered how I went down to the garden

gate as he came along, and how I had listened to his odd story of “Men

from Mars.”

I came down and went into the dining room. There were the mutton and

the bread, both far gone now in decay, and a beer bottle overturned,

just as I and the artilleryman had left them. My home was desolate. I

perceived the folly of the faint hope I had cherished so long. And then

a strange thing occurred. “It is no use,” said a voice. “The house is

deserted. No one has been here these ten days. Do not stay here to

torment yourself. No one escaped but you.”

I was startled. Had I spoken my thought aloud? I turned, and the French

window was open behind me. I made a step to it, and stood looking out.

And there, amazed and afraid, even as I stood amazed and afraid, were

my cousin and my wife—my wife white and tearless. She gave a faint cry.

“I came,” she said. “I knew—knew——”

She put her hand to her throat—swayed. I made a step forward, and

caught her in my arms.

X.

THE EPILOGUE.

I cannot but regret, now that I am concluding my story, how little I am

able to contribute to the discussion of the many debatable questions

which are still unsettled. In one respect I shall certainly provoke

criticism. My particular province is speculative philosophy. My

knowledge of comparative physiology is confined to a book or two, but

it seems to me that Carver’s suggestions as to the reason of the rapid

death of the Martians is so probable as to be regarded almost as a

proven conclusion. I have assumed that in the body of my narrative.

At any rate, in all the bodies of the Martians that were examined after

the war, no bacteria except those already known as terrestrial species

were found. That they did not bury any of their dead, and the reckless

slaughter they perpetrated, point also to an entire ignorance of the

putrefactive process. But probable as this seems, it is by no means a

proven conclusion.

Neither is the composition of the Black Smoke known, which the Martians

used with such deadly effect, and the generator of the Heat-Rays

remains a puzzle. The terrible disasters at the Ealing and South

Kensington laboratories have disinclined analysts for further

investigations upon the latter. Spectrum analysis of the black powder

points unmistakably to the presence of an unknown element with a

brilliant group of three lines in the green, and it is possible that it

combines with argon to form a compound which acts at once with deadly

effect upon some constituent in the blood. But such unproven

speculations will scarcely be of interest to the general reader, to

whom this story is addressed. None of the brown scum that drifted down

the Thames after the destruction of Shepperton was examined at the

time, and now none is forthcoming.

The results of an anatomical examination of the Martians, so far as the

prowling dogs had left such an examination possible, I have already

given. But everyone is familiar with the magnificent and almost

complete specimen in spirits at the Natural History Museum, and the

countless drawings that have been made from it; and beyond that the

interest of their physiology and structure is purely scientific.

A question of graver and universal interest is the possibility of

another attack from the Martians. I do not think that nearly enough

attention is being given to this aspect of the matter. At present the

planet Mars is in conjunction, but with every return to opposition I,

for one, anticipate a renewal of their adventure. In any case, we

should be prepared. It seems to me that it should be possible to define

the position of the gun from which the shots are discharged, to keep a

sustained watch upon this part of the planet, and to anticipate the

arrival of the next attack.

In that case the cylinder might be destroyed with dynamite or artillery

before it was sufficiently cool for the Martians to emerge, or they

might be butchered by means of guns so soon as the screw opened. It

seems to me that they have lost a vast advantage in the failure of

their first surprise. Possibly they see it in the same light.

Lessing has advanced excellent reasons for supposing that the Martians

have actually succeeded in effecting a landing on the planet Venus.

Seven months ago now, Venus and Mars were in alignment with the sun;

that is to say, Mars was in opposition from the point of view of an

observer on Venus. Subsequently a peculiar luminous and sinuous marking

appeared on the unillumined half of the inner planet, and almost

simultaneously a faint dark mark of a similar sinuous character was

detected upon a photograph of the Martian disk. One needs to see the

drawings of these appearances in order to appreciate fully their

remarkable resemblance in character.

At any rate, whether we expect another invasion or not, our views of

the human future must be greatly modified by these events. We have

learned now that we cannot regard this planet as being fenced in and a

secure abiding place for Man; we can never anticipate the unseen good

or evil that may come upon us suddenly out of space. It may be that in

the larger design of the universe this invasion from Mars is not

without its ultimate benefit for men; it has robbed us of that serene

confidence in the future which is the most fruitful source of

decadence, the gifts to human science it has brought are enormous, and

it has done much to promote the conception of the commonweal of

mankind. It may be that across the immensity of space the Martians have

watched the fate of these pioneers of theirs and learned their lesson,

and that on the planet Venus they have found a securer settlement. Be

that as it may, for many years yet there will certainly be no

relaxation of the eager scrutiny of the Martian disk, and those fiery

darts of the sky, the shooting stars, will bring with them as they fall

an unavoidable apprehension to all the sons of men.

The broadening of men’s views that has resulted can scarcely be

exaggerated. Before the cylinder fell there was a general persuasion

that through all the deep of space no life existed beyond the petty

surface of our minute sphere. Now we see further. If the Martians can

reach Venus, there is no reason to suppose that the thing is impossible

for men, and when the slow cooling of the sun makes this earth

uninhabitable, as at last it must do, it may be that the thread of life

that has begun here will have streamed out and caught our sister planet

within its toils.

Dim and wonderful is the vision I have conjured up in my mind of life

spreading slowly from this little seed bed of the solar system

throughout the inanimate vastness of sidereal space. But that is a

remote dream. It may be, on the other hand, that the destruction of the

Martians is only a reprieve. To them, and not to us, perhaps, is the

future ordained.

I must confess the stress and danger of the time have left an abiding

sense of doubt and insecurity in my mind. I sit in my study writing by

lamplight, and suddenly I see again the healing valley below set with

writhing flames, and feel the house behind and about me empty and

desolate. I go out into the Byfleet Road, and vehicles pass me, a

butcher boy in a cart, a cabful of visitors, a workman on a bicycle,

children going to school, and suddenly they become vague and unreal,

and I hurry again with the artilleryman through the hot, brooding

silence. Of a night I see the black powder darkening the silent

streets, and the contorted bodies shrouded in that layer; they rise

upon me tattered and dog-bitten. They gibber and grow fiercer, paler,

uglier, mad distortions of humanity at last, and I wake, cold and

wretched, in the darkness of the night.

I go to London and see the busy multitudes in Fleet Street and the

Strand, and it comes across my mind that they are but the ghosts of the

past, haunting the streets that I have seen silent and wretched, going

to and fro, phantasms in a dead city, the mockery of life in a

galvanised body. And strange, too, it is to stand on Primrose Hill, as

I did but a day before writing this last chapter, to see the great

province of houses, dim and blue through the haze of the smoke and

mist, vanishing at last into the vague lower sky, to see the people

walking to and fro among the flower beds on the hill, to see the

sight-seers about the Martian machine that stands there still, to hear

the tumult of playing children, and to recall the time when I saw it

all bright and clear-cut, hard and silent, under the dawn of that last

great day. . . .

And strangest of all is it to hold my wife’s hand again, and to think

that I have counted her, and that she has counted me, among the dead.